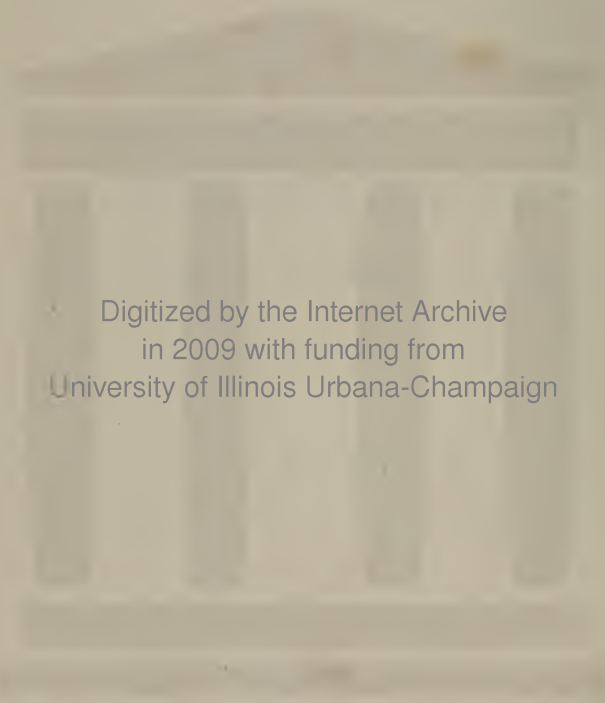




KATHIE BRANDE;

A FIRESIDE HISTORY OF A QUIET LIFE.

VOL. II.



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KATHIE BRANDE;

A

Fireside History of a Quiet Life.

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"MAUDE TALBOT," &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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KATHIE BRANDE.

A FIRESIDE HISTORY OF A QUIET LIFE.

I.

ONE Thursday morning Ann brought in my customary letter: I carried it away to my room to read, and when I came back and began to sew, my mother said, "Kathie, will you write to Stephen to-day? It is very strange that we have never heard of him since he went back."

She looked anxious and disappointed; and, indeed, his neglect was very painful to all of us. Presently in came Ann again with a message. "Mr. Withers's respects, and will Miss Kathie go up to his house at eleven o'clock."

“He wants to consult you about the children,” said my mother.

Since Christmas I had discontinued my school, and we thought this supposition the most natural.

At the hour appointed I went to the school-master’s house. Being ushered into his study, I found him still in his shawl-patterned dressing-gown, with a black velvet skull-cap covering his grizzled locks. He received me kindly, but nervously; offered me a chair near the fire, tried two or three himself, and finally, balancing himself on the edge of the table, took up two open letters, and handed them to me.

“This business is a very painful one, Miss Brande: will you have the goodness to read those letters,” he said.

For a minute or two I was so startled that the lines waved up and down before my eyes, and I could not read a word. Oh, the sickness of heart—the utter misery that fell on me when at last the sense was made out! Stephen was in disgrace—in debt; he must leave Oxford im-

mediately: what for, he left us to imagine. He characterised his misdoings as *folly*; and feared his expulsion would be a great trial to his mother. *Feared!* He knew it would.

Mr. Withers was delegated to break the bad news to her. The Master of his College spoke in more severe terms. Young Brande, he wrote, was totally unfit for the profession to which his friends had destined him. During his short career at the University, he had been reprimanded many times; his conduct was marked by every vice and every folly; his extravagance, indolence, and contempt of rules, dated from the beginning: no plea, no extenuation whatever appeared. The letter ended by saying that Stephen had contracted debts, for which his family must be responsible.

For some moments after the perusal of these two miserable letters, I sat quite silent, and, as it were, paralysed. I was recalled to myself by the sound of Mr. Withers's voice. "Give me the right to answer these two letters, Miss Brande," he was saying rapidly, as he stood

holding one of my passive hands; "let me take this misguided young man under my care. Be my wife. I would be very kind to you, Kathie. Do not decide hastily; it is not my wish to take advantage of your position."

"Stop, sir," I interrupted, withdrawing my fingers: "I am—I was to have been married this spring."

He flushed all over his face; walked to the window, and then came back. "You should have told me before," was all he said for a minute: then, "Consult with your mother, and let me know. I will do all I can for you."

I thanked him, and rose to go: he held open the study-door for me to pass out.

"Believe me, Miss Brande, I am most truly grieved for you," he said, shaking hands hurriedly.

I hastened out into the streets, grasping the two letters under my shawl.

Often the heavy rains fall at noon-tide. These were the first drops of the thunder shower that washed away so many flowers—uprooted so many

tender plants: no softening, vivifying rain, under which new buds spring up to blossom on the earth; but a wild tempest of icy wind and driving sleet that pierced to my inner heart, and left traces of sad wreck behind.

II.

When I re-entered the parlour on my return, my mother was not there; only Jean and Isabel sitting at their work in the window.

“You have not been long away, Kathie: I have not finished setting on this frill yet,” cried Jean.

“No matter: put them all away out of my sight; they will not be wanted,” I replied despairingly, sinking into a chair. My limbs failed me: I was as weak and weary as if I had walked ten miles, instead of as many dozen yards.

“Oh, Kathie, what has happened? Don't look so wild and white! Come up-stairs before

my mother sees you: she is gone out, but will soon be back."

Jean took my hand, and guided me up-stairs. I was perfectly passive: for the moment all nerve and fortitude seemed to have forsaken me.

If tears had flowed, it would have been a relief; but they were frozen at the source by the touch of this great sorrow.

Jean took off my bonnet, and laid her soft cheek against mine: "Tell us, Kathie: only tell us what hurts you," pleaded Isabel, who was on her knees beside me.

I suffered her to take the letters and read them; while I watched her face with a sort of dreary, helpless despair. Jean read over her shoulder: I saw her bite her lip to keep back her tears, and then turn away to the window. For a few seconds none of us spoke: you might have heard the beating of our hearts in the hush of the room.

"Here is my mother coming! oh, poor mother!" cried Jean suddenly. "How shall we tell her?"

Don't look so wretched, Kathie, or it will be ten times worse for her."

I forced myself to calmness, smoothed my hair, and passed out of my own room into my mother's, as I heard her coming up the stairs. The keen air had tinged her worn faded cheek with a pale colour: she looked cheerful, as if she had met with something pleasant in her walk. It seemed almost cruel to destroy this rare peace with our bad tidings. She did not notice our troubled countenances at once, but went to the dressing-table, and unfolded a parcel she had brought in—some fine cambric that I had commissioned her to buy for me the day before.

"Never mind that now, mother: we have news of Stephen," said I.

"Well! good news? He is not ill, is he?"

I gave her my brother's letter; the Master's I kept back: no need to wound her with that, I thought.

Her fortitude shamed us all: except for the slight flutter of her eyelids, and that the flush of exercise faded, her face was quite calm. She read the

letter twice through, then looked round upon us quietly. "Poor Stephen! my poor fatherless boy!" she said sorrowfully; "he must need comfort in his trouble: fetch me the inkstand, Jeanie, and I will write to him directly. Bad companions have led him astray; but I am sure my boy has a good heart. Kathie, will you tell Ann to get his room ready; I shall bid him come home to us: I feel sure he has been unjustly used."

Indeed my mother was to the full as indignant as she was sorrowful; and buoyed up for awhile by this fallacious comforter, I left her inditing a letter to my brother, and went listlessly about the duty required of me.

All that afternoon I sat over my sewing; I knew it would not be needed, but the mechanical work acted as a sedative and a restraint on my perturbed spirits. All the consequences of Stephen's disgrace had shown themselves to me in one burst the moment I learnt it; and now I thought them over, and tried to arrange them in my mind that they might be met with decent fortitude. Nothing must be done hastily: I would

wait until my brother came home—till he gave us an account of his liabilities; then I would write to Felix Mayne.

In the evening Liliás Fenton came in to see us, and to her my mother poured forth the bitter story of her son's wrongs and trials. The poor girl wept abundantly; and was sure some unfriend had wrought Stephen's disaster. No doubt her tender little heart prompted her to send a cheering letter in the wake of my mother's, for she was absolutely of opinion that he could do no wrong. Isabel would have had me give them the Master's letter; but I refused, and burnt it instead.

III.

The next morning's post brought a letter from Stephen—such a letter as it did us no good to read. It was entirely self-exculpatory: he blamed his home life, his early training, his friends, and his ignorance of the ways of society—

anything and everything, in short, but his own insubordination, idleness, and wilful extravagance. He calculated that his debts were nearly eight hundred pounds; and if they were not paid, he went on to say, he could never hold up his head in the world again. So ended this precious epistle that was to fill us all with such dismay. He asked for forgiveness indeed, but not until he had showed himself far more sinned against than sinning; and added in a postscript that he had been misled into borrowing money in the expectation of a much more considerable legacy from our grandmother Brande. Young men, he stated, did it every day; and the tradespeople were all ready to give credit in the prospect of ultimate payment. He was also indebted in considerable sums to two private friends, and he hoped we would send him the means to satisfy their claims at once. Such debts were debts of honour, we were informed.

It was not for poor stay-at-homes like my mother and me to understand the usages of such company as Stephen kept; but to contract liabilities

without having the actual power in hand to liquidate them, seemed to our ignorance but one phase—and that a most ruinous and treacherous one—of taking the money out of a neighbour's purse. Stephen had contracted his debts with nothing but an unfounded hope of ever paying them; and I do not scruple to say that we all felt very much ashamed of his unprincipled conduct. My mother could not refrain from tears.

“I knew he was weak to withstand temptation, but I never feared he could be seduced into anything so manifestly culpable as this,” said she. “It destroys confidence in him. You and I, Kathie, scarcely understand it: we would rather eat a dry crust than do what he has done.”

Isabel advised that he should be allowed to bear the brunt of his misdoings. He deserved it, perhaps; but there was our good name, and his future, to be considered.

“The debts must be paid, Kathie,” my mother said: “they must be paid—but how?”

She glanced round the parlour, as if it contained

valuables that could be disposed of; though all its contents would scarcely have sold for as many pounds as Stephen owed hundreds.

“There is my five hundred pounds untouched; let that go,” I replied quietly. “It will pay the greater part. The tradespeople ought to have their money the first: the others must wait.”

“No, Kathie, no!” cried my mother; “that would be unjust: I can sell my annuity.”

“My plan is the best; let my legacy go. I shall still have something left, you know: indeed, we all shall. Your annuity you must give up for a year or two; and, meanwhile, the school must be made to support us all. I will go round amongst my old pupils; if they do not come back, others will be found.”

My mother looked questioningly at the work in my hand: I understood her, and answered, “We shall not be married this spring: we must practice waiting a little longer, or give each other up..”

My voice was steady, but my heart felt as

cold as if I were pronouncing my own death sentence.

“Oh, Kathie! cannot I do something? Let me do something,” pleaded Jean, clinging with both her arms round my neck. “I am growing up; Stephen may get a situation: need you be sacrificed?”

“Be still, Jean; I have said my say: there is nothing more to be suggested, and nothing more to be done till Stephen comes home.”

I put her from me with an affectation of sternness: another tender word, and I must have broken out into a passion of weeping. My mother followed me to my room, whither I went to look my sorrows in the face, and grow familiar with them: “Kathie, Kathie, God will reward you!” she said with her face pressed to mine: “now more than ever you are a comfort to me, my child.”

Left alone again, I took out Felix Mayne's last letter, and read it through twice: not in expectation of finding comfort therein—for every expression of hopeful love and trust was a pang—but because

such was my custom. It is well to regard our position boldly: to say, This must I do, this must I forego, this must I endure. Cowardly shrinking avails us nothing: it is easiest to stand to our work and do it. I took my difficulties, figuratively, in my two hands and examined them with critical coolness: at the first shock the suffering was less than afterwards. I had not yet lived in the world so long that I need be sick of its burdens and wish to quit it, but from my narrow loop-hole of existence it looked a very different place from what it had done but one little week ago. I had waited and worked in hope; now I must wait and work in patience. It seemed as if I ought to give Felix up; but oh! I could not be so unselfish yet: I could not with my own hand uproot the deep-struck passion of my life, nor turn away from my lips the waters of hope, scant as they were becoming in the dry and thirsty land on which I had entered. Unknown sources of trouble were swelling up in turbid floods around our home. Poverty—close, pinching poverty—such as hitherto none of us had known, lay in wait

at our threshold. By our hearth was no joy but such as each of us might carry in her heart to lighten the weary days.

Well, let us toil and be thankful! There are greater ills in the world than work and poverty.

IV.

Isabel was wearying now to be gone back to Aunt Aurelia in London; and, an opportunity offering for her being put in charge of a person of our acquaintance during the journey, we sent her away. I was not sorry when she left us: she liked sunshine and laughter and luxury; and those pleasant things were now banished Percie Court. She could ill brook the close hand of poverty, or the shadow of hard work. I think she would have either pined and died herself, or worn us out with caprice and complaints, had she stayed amongst us.

Our great impatience now was for Stephen's coming. He sent no second letter, and for

fourteen days we were kept on the rack of suspense. At the end of that time he appeared, looking miserably jaded and ill; but determined to brazen out his disgrace. He had passed the interval between leaving Oxford and coming home, in London—an interval, if we might judge from his appearance, of riot and debauch. My mother was cut to the heart, but she never reproached him once.

It was touching to see Liliás Fenton's mute distress, when she came eager to comfort him and raise his spirits, and he received her with careless rudeness—to cover, perhaps, his sense of shame.

I pitied her much as one would pity a poor fluttering, wounded dove, when there is a kite swooping down the sky to seize it. Of all the sorrows that can overtake us, surely the sorest, the most unbearable is the shameful ruin of what we love. I scarcely dared to look in Liliás' face after I had once seen her great grief: it seemed as if we were all guilty towards her.

We were not long in receiving a statement

from Stephen of what he owed; but he kept back some matters until what he styled his "debts of honour" were paid in full. It was difficult to make him be sincere, for my mother's troubled calmness frightened him, and he thought that by leaving some things to creep out by degrees, he was lessening the force of the calamity.

For weeks and months bills kept flowing in from tradespeople both in London and in Oxford: I believe, in the end, the sum he first stated was nearly doubled. The share that fell to me from the thousand pounds left to us by my grandmother, went to satisfy each claim in part; and my mother's annuity was set aside for the payment of small instalments yearly, until the whole should be liquidated. This part of the business my mother herself transacted; and I must say, those individuals who had been misled into allowing my brother credit, were much more considerate and patient than we had any right to expect from them.

V.

One afternoon, about a week after Stephen's return home, I betook myself to my closet, spread paper before me, and began to write to Felix Mayne. It was a long, a hard, a bitter task; but I had nerved myself to it, and I did it. I set my position before him; my plain and visible duty, as it seemed to me: my mother ageing and declining in health; Jean yet a child; Stephen unprovided for; myself the only worker of the household. I offered to break our engagement, the fulfilment of which seemed so visionary; this would be the best for him: of myself I said nothing.

Then I laid out on my bed the wedding clothes, made and unmade, folded them straight, and laid them carefully away in the drawers, scattering over all some sprays of sweet lavender and a few tears—the hottest and bitterest, because, perhaps, the most selfish, I ever shed.

Three days after came a letter from Felix,

which gave me the comfort I much needed, in the assurance of his faithful love. His disappointment, and his wrath against its cause, he scarcely tried to conceal; but he wrote cheeringly, and strove to persuade me that a few months would see Stephen in a situation, able to support our mother, and to set me free. Ah! I knew the delusion of this suggestion. Never could I trust my mother to his care now: that confidence was quite done away with.

During Easter week I went round amongst the ladies in the Close who had already befriended me, and told them that it was my purpose to reopen my school, which had been closed since Christmas. Some insinuated a wish to know the reason; and their curiosity being satisfied, they expressed their regret, and promised me their good offices. This resulted in the return of five of my old pupils and two new ones: with these I began my career afresh. On the third morning, two of Mr. Withers' little girls walked in, just as if they had never been from under my care; and the green baize benches were again filled.

My mind was now comparatively at ease: here was the source of a mean and scanty subsistence for us; bread—daily bread—but little else. Truly, indeed, “is evil wrought by want of thought.” When my brother saw before his eyes hourly the consequences of his imprudence, he must have felt some qualms of repentance; but, for the most part, he preserved a sullen silence, as if he suffered wrongfully, instead of being the cause of such open and hidden calamity to all who belonged to him.

Imagine me now living quietly on from day to day, busied in the same unvaried round of duties: not quite spiritless; not quite hopeless; but growing graver and stiller as my brief summer wanes to its close. I have had my season of light and glow, and must be content to let the shadows creep up over the flush of noon: who knows but beyond them may stretch a long evening of quiet beauty?

VI.

The next thing to be thought of, when Stephen's college difficulties were reduced into shape, was to provide him with a situation: here his pride came out in a most disagreeable way, and threatened to prove an insuperable obstacle to all our efforts. He absolutely refused to accept of any employment in Eversley, because he fancied that he should be lowered in the estimation of former associates, if he were known to be engaged in the drudgery of a provincial lawyer's or banker's office; for anything but a clerkship he was equally unfitted by education and by disposition.

After a time, I began to pity him sincerely. The bane of his life now was "nothing to do:" no work, and not the means of amusement. He avoided his old companions and former haunts, and only wandered about the Close after dusk, when people were mostly within their houses.

It was melancholy to see him, in his strong and beautiful youth, idling away his time in a little room; dozing, or smoking, or reading trashy books. He had brought down his guns, his fishing tackle, boxing gloves, portraits of famous horses, sporting characters, and theatrical notorieties, and embellished his hutch with them; and he stayed amongst them nearly all the day, away from the rest of us. It never appeared to trouble him that he had brought such poverty amongst us, or that he depended on our labour for support: he was just the one pair of slothful hands in the house; and though he did say sometimes that he wished he had a situation, he made no personal exertion to find one. The friends to whom we could apply for counsel in our strait were soon counted over—they began and ended with Felix Mayne, Mr. Withers, and old Paul Fenton; Stephen's were not likely to benefit him much now.

In this interval my brother contrived to re-establish all his influence over Liliás. One afternoon I was at the antiquary's house when he came in.

“Where is Lilius to-day?” was his first question of the old man.

She came in while he was speaking, with the blushing smile on her fair young face that always greeted him; she took some work into her hands, and sat toying with it idly, while Stephen leant over her chair, and talked to her in whispers. Paul had fallen into a doze over a piece of yellow parchment covered with cabalistic figures. It was like going back a couple of centuries, to sit in that quaintly furnished parlour, crowded with curiosities and relics of past times. There was nothing but stiff-backed oaken chairs covered with faded tapestry, to rest upon; costly bureaux inlaid with ivory and precious woods were grown dark with smoke and age where they stood, and the blackened pictures on the wainscot scarcely showed, in the twilight of the room, even the outline of their subjects. The weird old man seemed to belong to his possessions, and they to him; but bright-haired Lilius moved about among his musty treasures like a sunbeam in a charnel-house. It was a pleasant thing to see

her at this period. Her step was always light and bounding; soft, sweet gushes of song came trilling from her lips; I even thought that with happiness she was gaining strength and a more hardy bloom. Stephen must have taken a delight in her kindling eyes, that met his with such a tender sympathy; her cheek that glowed at his coming; her heart that loved him with all its tenderness and all its might. Oh, brother mine! you were not worthy of that pure, that holy love! It pleased your man's vanity; it flattered your self-esteem; but its grace and beauty were as much wasted on you as are morning dews on sterile rocks!

I remember his calling me into his hutch one evening, and saying that he wanted to talk about Lilius—a weakness in which I could not refuse to indulge him, though plenty of work awaited me in the parlour.

“Kathie, I want to give Lily some little present,” said he: “don't you think she would like it?”

“Yes; I am sure she would value anything from you: what prevents you from making it?”

“Nothing but the lack of cash.”

In this dilemma I could not help him, so I said nothing, and he began to disarrange the internal economy of my workbox, which I had brought in and set down on his table, whistling in a subdued tone to help him to solve his difficulty. I wondered he did not think of selling those expensive and useless things on the walls of his room. At last a brilliant idea struck him.

“Kathie, you never sport any trinketry: have you nothing laid by that you could part with?” He reddened slightly, when, scarcely thinking him in earnest, I glanced quickly up into his face; but his confusion enlightened me.

I said I had some ornaments, but none of modern fashion: all I possessed had been given to me by my mother or my grandmother. He bade me make haste, and fetch them at once; so I went to my closet, and brought forth my treasure box. The only thing I laid aside he coveted greatly, but I would not resign it, for a reason I had; and finding me inexorable on that point, he at last selected a little topaz brooch set round with three

rows of seed pearls, which was sufficiently simple and pretty not to betray its antiquity.

“And you are sure Lilius will not know it?” he asked anxiously.

“She has never seen it : my grandmother gave it to me when I was at Crofton, and I have never worn it since.”

He then ordered me to cut off a lock from his handsome head, to be inserted into the little box at the back of the brooch ; showing a good deal of anxiety lest my scissors should reap too much of his auburn glory.

“I remember you playing me a trick once, Kathie, and that was the only time I ever saw my mother really cross with you ; for you had spoilt her darling’s beauty. Do you recollect ? it was one fifth of November, and some of us had been letting off fireworks, and almost blowing ourselves up. I came home all singed, and you would shear my hair until I looked like a little puritan : don’t play me such a trick now ; for if you do, I’ll never forgive you.”

While recalling this delinquency, he had held

me at arm's length; but the warning given, I was permitted to prune one crisp, round, glossy curl, and to lay it carefully in a box with the brooch to be carried to the jeweller's.

"You are a good little soul, Kathie, and I'm much obliged to you," said my brother cheerfully: "I'll do you a good turn some day too; you deserve it."

And, indeed, he did afterwards present me with a rich canary-coloured bonnet ribbon, with scarlet edges, much too resplendent to be worn; and so I saved it very carefully, and met with it years later specked with mildew and still in all the rustle and crispness of an unworn silk: its edge of poppy-colour was quite gone.

The next day Stephen showed me this little gift before he carried it to Liliás; the jeweller had cleaned it, and as the pearls were quite pure, it might have been just bought out of his shop, my brother remarked. Many and many a time did I see this little gift of her lover's fastening the black velvet that encircled Liliás's fair throat. She set as high a value upon it as she could

have done if it had been purchased by his life-blood.

From this incident, it may be conjectured that Stephen's finances were sunk very low; but when he had been about a month at home I found them much recruited. Not knowing that he had any means of making money, I questioned him as to how he had obtained it, and extracted from him a reluctant confession that he had spent the evening before with some old friends, and that they played cards.

"Stephen," said I, quite angrily, "you are bent on your own ruin, and ours too! Who will employ you with such a habit as that of gaming? You must give it up: you *must*."

There was this peculiarity in Stephen's temper, that when any person assumed a decisive mastery over him, he gave in; he did now: he begged me not to let my mother know, or Mr. Withers; and promised solemnly never to play again. So long as he remained in Eversley, he kept his word.

VII.

It was at this time that, with many misgivings, and more quiet laughs at my absurd presumption, I selected from the papers in my cupboard some of those which appeared to me the best, and enclosed them to the publisher of a very popular periodical. With my own hands I dropped the packet into the box at the post-office, having at the moment a very fluttering pulse and crimson cheek, as if I were committing a crime in which I feared to be detected: it is my belief that if the act had been charged upon me there and then, I should have been guilty of the moral delinquency of denying it; but as I had told my intentions to no one, there was not that to fear. When the venture was fairly gone out of my possession, and no amount of wishing could bring it back, I felt almost frightened at what I had done. I had sent my name and address to a perfect stranger, with copies of verses which now I know to have been

wretched, puling stuff, offering him these precious maunderings for his magazine.

I suppose I must have deluded myself into some hope of success, though I tried to say every morning, "Oh, it is not likely I shall ever hear any more about it!" yet at the post hour I was always on the watch to intercept letters, with a dull pain of expectancy at my heart: nobody can imagine it, for such a cause, but those who have gone through it. But I might have spared myself all these quiverings and false shames, for I never did hear anything of this, my first and last literary venture. No doubt my note was read, and with its accompaniments fluttered quietly down into the editor's waste-basket—or perhaps it had the honour of lighting the editorial cigar, and its contents disturbed in no wise the equanimity of the smoker's mind. I had an idea that all editors smoked, to help them through their troubles in the shape of voluntary contributors: and, to say truth, if many of them resembled me, such a sedative would be highly necessary. When a

month had elapsed I gave up all hope of hearing from the publisher, and made up my mind that my lucubrations had departed to the limbo of rejected addresses; probably the best thing that could have befallen them, both for them and me.

But it was a disappointment. We were—it is no use mincing the matter—we were very poor. I do not mean to insinuate sordid or degrading poverty—that never came near us—but it was the struggle to maintain appearances as they had been, which necessitated a close and rigid economy. Jean gave up her music-lessons again; we left off our subscription to the book-society; and, in short, dispensed with everything but absolute necessaries: yet the west parlour was not despoiled of any of the little decorations and improvements we had effected; my father's valuable books still filled their shelves, and, while suffering most, we had a pride in keeping all neat and pleasant around us, that, as Jean said, we might not seem to ourselves to be ill off.

The dear child's lively temper was a great comfort to all of us at this time; she was always cheerful, always helpful: her spirits rose in proportion as our difficulties increased, and she had ever a hopeful word for me when weary and flagging over my daily task-work. And not words only but useful assistance she could give amongst the children in the school, so that I added four more to my number.

It was now, when the excitement of the sorrow was past, that I most felt its weight. The spring which I had counted on with such glowing hopes, was a very heavy season to me—so heavy that I cannot express it. Trifles in such frames of mind have a vast influence over us: to one more little straw our weakness succumbs. I call to remembrance one Saturday afternoon, while Stephen was still with us. He had been teasing me—not, perhaps, ill-naturedly, but yet in a way that chafed me—about my long engagement and Felix Mayne's constancy. He saw me picking some leaves which were blighted from one of the rose-trees that had come with me from

Crofton, and that prompted him: he began to make jesting comparisons between the plant which seemed to be drooping and dying gradually, and me in my pale, grey life. It did flash into my mind that it was he who had intercepted my sunshine; but I made no retort, and went on with what I was doing.

“How quiet Dick is this afternoon!” observed Jean, whose low-hummed song lacked its usual accompaniment. I recollected suddenly that I had never heard his voice in the morning, and reached out my hand to take down the cage from above the flower-stand. One glance was enough: poor little Dick was dead. Stephen came to look at it.

“You ought to have a *post-mortem* examination,” he suggested, laughing.

Jean bade him be quiet and go away, which he presently did, with a sneer at our wasted sensibility. Foolish or not foolish, weak or not weak, there were many tears shed over that little dead bird. I remembered how he would flutter to the edge of his cage, when I came

down early in the morning, and how merrily he would sing for the few minutes when he had his liberty alone in the room; I remembered, too, whose gift he had been, and what an old friend he was.

Jean and I buried him under a thorn-bush in the garden, and you cannot think how hushed and silent the west parlour seemed with him no longer trilling his song in the sunshine. The cage was put away out of sight that afternoon.

VIII.

One morning, while the west parlour was still filled with little scholars, Mr. Withers called and asked to speak with me, or my mother. He was shown up into Stephen's hutch, and there I found him conversing with my brother, and looking very grim when I went in.

Mr. Withers had not ceased to manifest an interest in his old pupil, ill as he had fulfilled his predictions; and his present visit was for the

purpose of telling us that his brother-in-law, Mr. Penwitham, a banker in London, had a vacancy for a junior clerk, and that he had consented to receive Stephen in that capacity on his recommendation.

“The salary is eighty pounds for the first year,” said our kind friend: “you will have to go on trial for a month, and if you acquit yourself steadily during that period you may get forward; but if you choose to waste this opportunity, I wash my hands of you entirely.”

My brother was profuse in his expression of thanks; but Mr. Withers cut him short. “Deeds, not words, this time, young sir,” was his grim rejoinder. “Penwitham is willing to befriend you, but his clerks are only so many calculating machines: if they work well all is right; if not, he sends them about their business. I want you to understand that your good or ill fortune is in your own hands, and that I have no more influence to exercise for you.”

“I will do my utmost to recover your good opinion, sir,” said Stephen.

“I hope you will, for the sake of all belonging to you. The place is waiting for you now, and I should advise his going up to town immediately, Mrs. Brande; and remember, sir, you present yourself at Penwitham’s without delay. With business men, punctuality is a cardinal virtue.”

My mother said that he could leave Eversley in three days; she was only sorry he was to be removed so far from her: she regarded London as a vast net of temptation, spread and baited for the entrapping of unwary young men, and feared that he might become entangled in it.

“He cannot go in leading-strings all his life, madam,” Mr. Withers dryly remarked, in answer to her fears: “let us hope that the false step he has already made will make him take heed how he walks. Come to me to-morrow, Stephen, and I will give you a letter of introduction to Penwitham.”

My brother apostrophized his kind master as a “crusty old tiger” the moment he was out of hearing; but he was overjoyed at this prospect of emancipation from the dreary dullness of home,

and went off in haste to communicate the tidings to Lilius Fenton and her father. He returned in about two hours in a most remarkably surly temper: we wondered what could have overtaken him, for the mood lasted all day. I sat up with him long after the rest; and then, growing communicative, he opened his grievances to me with a very dismal countenance.

“Kathie, have not you always understood that old Paul Fenton was very rich?” he began.

“Report said so, Stephen; but his manner of living contradicted it: I never gave the matter a serious thought.”

“That is so like you! Well, I always believed him to be miserly rather than poor; and now, according to his own account, it seems that he is really ill off. Lilius will have no fortune—nothing but what the old man may leave at his death: trumpery curiosities, pictures, and such rubbish!”

“Did you expect anything more?”

“Of course I did: how can you be such a fool as to ask such a question, Kathie?”

When Stephen fell into his savage mood I always left him, and did so now. The next day he had come to himself, and, in a calmer humour, informed me that he had asked Paul what his intentions were concerning his daughter, and that the old man had stated his circumstances to be poor, and even embarrassed. The mercenary sentiments my brother expressed promised very ill for Liliás's happiness when it should be given into his keeping. Paul had stipulated that the marriage should not take place for three years, by which time there was a reasonable hope Stephen's prospects would be settled; and his disappointment about the money appeared greatly to lessen the hardship of this long probation.

We were very quiet after he was gone: his letters to us were rare; those to Liliás scarcely more frequent. Often after post-time she would come over to our house to see if we had any news from London, when the letter she carried in her bosom was a month old at least; and after a little talk with my mother she went away comforted.

Thus the spring passed, and the summer with its

holidays, which were not much holidays to us; and the little scholars were again conning their lessons in the west parlour. Felix's letters came regularly as the Minster clock struck: pleasant music they made in my heart, and coming so often it was never quite empty of joy. Sometimes I used wantonly to afflict myself by fancying how wearisome the weeks would be were this waymark in their passage removed. I think my spirit would have failed, and that I never could have borne the burden of my day, but for the vital strength of hope they kept alive in my heart.

IX.

One evening in the October of this year, as Jean and I sat idly on the hearth in the dusk, our scholars being gone home and the tea not yet brought in, we heard a parley going on at the foot of the stairs, between Ann and some stranger: the talk was brief; and while we were wondering whom it might be, a quick, firm tread

came up the steps which, from its echo of a certain foot I knew, made my heart beat foolishly fast. The door opened, and a tall figure loomed through the shadowy twilight.

“Who is it?” cried I; rising up with my face all in a glow.

“Who is it? Felix Mayne, Kathie!”

He held out his arms, and I am not prepared to deny that the meeting was as happy as it was unexpected.

Jean disappeared, to apprise my mother of his arrival, and then he began to tell me how it was he came to Eversley at that season.

“I am on my way to Kingston, Kathie: I have exchanged duties with a man who has a large family, and dreads to remain in the place at this time: there is a dreadful epidemic showing itself amongst the poor—a malignant fever. I know the place well: it breeds pestilence.”

“Oh, Felix!”

He looked down into my face.

“What does that mean, Kathie? You do not

begrudge me to my work : that would be unworthy both of me and you."

"No, Felix ; I dare not do that."

He stood with his back to the fire-place, looking away out of the window. There was an ardent, eager expression in his face, which recalled to me my grandmother's warning. I must strive to lay no check on this fiery spirit ; it would bear neither curb nor rein from the most loving hand : my slavish, coward fears for him must lie mute in my timid heart.

"Kathie, I have found my work now, and only want my helper : when will you come to me ?" he asked, turning his eyes full on me.

"Oh ! I dare not think of it yet, Felix."

"Why not ? Kathie, I must claim you before Christmas. Do you hear me ? I *must* have you."

"Felix, do you remember a little paper-book that you left with me the last time you were here ? I found in it a sentiment of Luther's—'It is not safe for a man to do anything contrary to his conscience.' How can I do what you ask ?

What would become of my mother and Jean? It would be contrary to my conscience to leave them yet."

"Let me hear all about it, Kathie. What you have done, and what you have undertaken to do."

He drew a chair forwards, and sat down, listening very sternly to all I said, and interrupting me by no comment. When I spoke of the relief it was to our minds that Stephen had got a situation, he nodded acquiescence; and when I finished speaking, he said very quietly, "Kathie, you have culled yet another sentiment out of that common-place book of mine, which I wish had never been within your reach: 'Say to all manner of happiness, I can do without thee; with self-renunciation life begins.'"

"No, Felix, no! I could not live without happiness!" I cried eagerly.

"But you are learning that lesson, Kathie; and would try to force it on me also."

"You are going away now from comparative safety into an imminent peril, Felix, because you feel that there lies your duty. Would you turn

back because I tremble for you; would you, Felix?"

He looked me steadily in the face for a moment or two, then answered—

"No, Kathie: I dare not be an unfaithful servant. But you would not ask it?"

"And I only entreat you to be patient for, perhaps, a year. Nothing is perilled by the delay. My duty is as plain to me as yours to you; let me do it."

"Kathie, recollect that your renunciation is not simply *self*-renunciation: you compel me to a sacrifice; which, being unwilling, is not worthy, like yours."

His tone, full of an almost bitter reproach, made my throat swell and my eyes glitter: I turned my face away to hide them; but that moment he was beside me, holding my hands, and saying—

"Tears! Oh, my darling! my Kathie! I am cruel: forgive me! Surely this little heart has enough to bear without my adding to its sorrows! Kathie, don't cry! don't cry!"

It did seem to me, at that moment, as if to expect him to wait and wait, year after year, with all a woman's faith and patience, were too much. I owed it to his love and tenderness that he did not accuse me of coldness or indifference, and on that plea cast me off, as incapable of understanding or returning his devotion.

The deepest, truest passion ever reposes in a simple faith.

"Kathie, you do with me what you will," he said with a sigh. "Be as just to me as to your other claims. Take counsel with your heart instead of your cool little head. I know it will plead for me."

"Felix, I must not listen to you any longer: let me go and seek my mother, and tell her you are here. Jean has not found her."

"Not in this way, Kathie: you cannot leave me in this way!"

He held out his arms, and I crept into them weeping. My heart did plead then that there might be its rest always. When I went away upstairs to find the others, it seemed as if a voice

of passionate entreaty followed me: "Kathie, Kathie," it wailed; "Kathie, why will you leave me?" But it was only fancy: the sound came out of my own soul.

X.

Felix Mayne left us the same evening and went forward to Kingston. The tone of his letters soon betrayed that he was happier in the midst of his onerous duties there than he had ever been in quiet, secluded Crofton. One district of his parish was, he wrote, severely visited by the epidemic; being low, densely populated, and very ill-drained. I always now looked anxiously for Thursday mornings, and often stood at the window into the court, watching till the postman came. It happened, however, one morning, that some duty called me off guard; and when I inquired of Ann, just before going into school, if the postman had come, she replied—

“There was no letters, Miss; I saw him pass ten minutes since.”

The disappointment struck me very keenly; and when I thought that this was the first time Felix's letters had missed since we were engaged, it assumed a painful importance. Jean suggested that perhaps, during this sickly season, he might be so fully occupied in his parish, that he could not make time for his usually long epistles so often. What the child meant for comfort only gave me more uneasiness. I imagined him ill, and incapable of writing. I, however, kept my fears to myself, and wrote to Felix, begging him to let me hear as usual from him, even if he sent but a blank sheet of paper, with his mottoed seal, “All's well.”

For once, my terrors were unfounded: Felix was well, and hard at work amongst his people, he wrote; my letter had missed posting in time, because, when just finishing it, he had been summoned in haste to perform the last offices of religion for a poor man who was dying of the fever. But anxiety for his safety had palpably

presented itself to my mind, and refused to be exorcised. I well knew how he would labour amongst his poor; with what devotion, with what self-forgetfulness: no hour too late, no case too desperate, no danger too imminent, where his duty bade him go.

My Christmas thoughts that year were lonely and sad. Felix could not come to us: he kept his festival in a vigil amongst the sick and afflicted; and my mother, and Jean, and I, talked round the Yule-tide fire of the loved and absent ones who had made the west parlour so gay last Christmas-time. It was a sunshiny, warm day, and Ann said to me, as I stood looking out on the Close—

“Ay, Miss Kathie, a green Yule makes a full churchyard.”

And the New Year began.

XI.

What a terrible year that was! What a time of mourning from one end of the land to the other! Close upon the fever followed another pestilence; more cruel, more fearful than the first. Eversley suffered from it awfully. It became necessary to enclose a grave-yard without the walls; and there its victims lie, by the score and by the hundred, rich and poor, high and low together. That part of Kingston in which Felix Mayne lived was almost decimated. We wrote to each other twice a week now; and though his letters were sometimes not more than two lines, they brought me the peace and satisfaction of knowing that he still laboured on unstricken in the midst of danger.

That spring the trees were sheeted with glorious blossom; the earth brought forth abundantly; the sky of that early summer was sultry blue; its air warm, soft, fragrant; yet over the fairest

scenes a livid phantom came sweeping silently, and wherever the shadow of its wings fell was the sound of weeping for those who return no more. The palace chamber could not shut it out; and it darkened, with its fearsome pall, the hearths of homes where Peace and Love were strangers, yet death a dread. Its foul breath came suddenly upon the cheek of health, and made mortality a loathsome thing—a thing to be thrust hastily under the sod. It snapped the strong cords of human love, and stood by beds where men perished—deserted of their kind. It met the mother fleeing from her children; the lover from his mistress; and hurled them back into the grasp of the grave they sought to shun. The heart of the proudest trembled at its presence. The lip of the sneerer quivered into a prayer as it went by.

Many were the souls that flitted that year through the Valley of the Shadow of Death: some, faint with the burden and heat of their day, longing to be at rest; some looking back regretfully at the apples of Sodom, dashed untasted

from their lips; some with the lamp of faith brightly burning, and a glory shining on them from the near heaven. Many childless firesides it made; many orphans it bereft of all protection, and left them to meet the world-storms alone. Here one, and there one: now the fairest of the flock, then the thriftless scapegrace—the black sheep; now the good house-mother, then the bread-winner—the head of the family; here the tender nursling, there the hoary head of the old man. The shadow fell upon them, and they were not. Our threshold it did not cross; but in one of the courts in the Barbican died Ann's mother: in the evening she was going about her work, strong and well; in the morning she was dead. This pestilence did its work swiftly.

“I am almost over-tasked,” Felix wrote to me about midway in July; “my rector has gone to the sea with his young family, and my fellow-curate has resigned his post; so that the whole burden of the parish rests on my shoulders. The epidemic increases in malignancy; it seizes more, and ends in more cases fatally. A sort of terror

has got hold of the people: they grow reckless, neglect ordinary precautions, and will not listen to advice; many die as much from fear of the disease as from the disease itself; or their depression of spirits lays them peculiarly open to its attack. Hannah is of the greatest service to me just now: so many of the wealthier people have forsaken the town that there are more hungry mouths to fill amongst the poor than usual, and I make her my almoner. She is a perfectly fearless woman, and goes with equal willingness amongst sick and well. I dare not regret your absence now, Kathie; perhaps, had you been with me, I might have thought my life more yours than my people's, and have left my work as others have done. I may hope to be preserved to you through all this troublous time; but if, my labour ended, I am called away, Kathie will remember that I have but fulfilled a faithful servant's duty, and that to such God says, 'Well done!'"

My tears fell fast as I read: this letter seemed to be written in a weary mood, as if the pen were often

taken up, and laid down again by an unsteady hand: the lines were faint and irregular; the words sometimes half blotted out. I answered it that evening, but very cheerfully: it was for me to encourage him, not to depress. I told him that in Eversley the disease was growing less fatal; that people's faces no longer wore that blank of fear and suspicion which had been so common in the streets; the church-bells tolled less frequently; and we could walk about the town without meeting those gloomy funeral processions at every corner.

Five painful days I waited for another letter: a Thursday passed, and none came. On the Saturday I got a note from Hannah: its contents I guessed before they were read. My presentiments were realized. "My master has sunk through fatigue: the mind would not let the body rest," wrote the faithful woman: "he lies as still and as helpless as a bairn. The Rector has been forced to come back, and is grieved now that ever he went away: he has left his children at the sea, and stays here. The doctor says master has been over-

worked, and that it is a low fever he has taken ; but he has no fears of him yet. He is quite himself, and bids me write every day, and you are to do the same."

By the next post—

"My dear master is worse ; but the doctor tells us the fever must have its time. Dear Miss Kathie, could you come to Kingston? He has not asked this, but he talks about you for ever ; and I know it is what he wishes, only he is afraid about you. The Rector has gone away to his own house, where he can be better attended to. I am sure I have no time for him now : I am not going to give up the care of my master to any of them hospital nurses. Miss Kathie, you have your mother and your friends to think for ; so if you are afraid of this fever you must not come : but if you are not given to be nervous I should say you would be quite safe, and you know whom it would comfort to see your face. I do believe it would be better than wine or medicine to him."

Sunday though it was, I quietly packed up

a little trunk, and told my mother whither I was going, and why.

“Kathie, I will advise you neither one way nor the other,” she said, with serious tenderness. “You know what it is right to do, and what will console you in the worst event. But my impression is that he will recover.”

“Oh, yes! he will recover; but go, Kathie, go,” whispered Jean: “I would, if I were you.”

Miss Bootle, who came in to tea after afternoon service, did her best to dissuade me from my intention, assuring me that it was tempting death to enter Kingston. But for myself I had no fear: my only thought was how soonest to reach Felix.

XII.

It was about six o'clock of a sultry August evening when I arrived at Kingston. The artisans, factory-people, and dock-labourers, were just leaving work, and the streets were full of

hurry, noise, and confusion. Before I reached the quarter where Felix lived there were many narrow lanes to thread, built in with lofty houses, very old and tottering, and evidently crammed to the roof with poor tenants. From the upper windows of these abodes fluttered lines of rags drying in the close, smoky air, and here and there a slatternly or bedizened head looked out to watch the passing stream below. What particularly struck me, amongst the poorer people whom I met, was the expression of haggard indifference on most of their faces, which passed into a startled affright as they came upon groups who were gathered to watch some funeral start from one or other of the crowded tenements. Eight of these melancholy assemblages I passed between the place where I left the coach and my destination.

When almost ready to drop with weariness I saw the church where Felix laboured. It was a grey old edifice, with a handsome tower, and all round it was an up-heaved strip of turf, which exhibited the neglect and desecration

characteristic of town grave-yards. Close by the church was a small ivy-covered cottage—the Rectory—and here Felix lived. The sun shone full on the front, and every blind was down. I felt almost sick with fear as I went in at the little gate, and up the box-edged path to the door: could it be too late?

Hannah opened the door, and her countenance reassured me, for she smiled gravely.

“I knew you’d come, Miss Kathie: I looked for you,” said she, and led me into the parlour.

It showed but too plainly that its owner had not been there for many days: dust lay white on the books, and the ink in the stand was dry.

“How is your master, Hannah?”

“The fever gains a little. I won’t promise, Miss Kathie, that he’ll know you,” was the reply.

I turned away to the window for a minute or two, and she let me be. “And when may I see him?” I at length asked.

“If he wakes quiet, I will tell him you are

here; but if not we must wait till eight o'clock, to hear what the doctor says. Oh, Miss Kathie! I do hope I have not done wrong in bringing you over to Kingston; but you do look tired and wan."

Presently she brought me some tea, and that revived me a little; but for three dreary hours I sat alone in that little room, wearing out my heart and my strength with woeful thoughts.

It was a very hot, dry evening; the air seemed filled with particles of fine white dust; and though I set the window wide, no freshness came in. The flower-beds were baked and cracked for lack of moisture; the grass parched, and the flowers drooping. The great old elms in the churchyard cast a cool shadow over the graves, but the Rectory garden lay unsheltered to the blinding sunshine. I was glad to see it fade gradually upwards on the opposite houses, till only the garret windows glittered in its red rays; for though the twilight was close and stifling, still the dim greyness rested my aching eyes.

Twice the passing bell of the adjoining church had gone since I sat there, and once I had heard it answered by another some distance off. I tried to distinguish separate sounds in the confused hum of that great busy town; for every sense seemed sharpened into double acuteness by nervous anxiety.

There were voices—children's shrill happy voices—at play under the churchyard wall; others more distant mixed up with the roll of heavily laden waggons, the rattle of lighter vehicles, and the tramp of thousands of work-weary feet. Then there was a rushing as of water through the sluice of a mill, and the whirr! whirr! of some machinery, not far off, which never ceased night or day, except on the Sabbath. In the old elms were a few noisy, quarrelsome sparrows, and in some distant quarter of the town a band of itinerant musicians were playing lively tunes; for when the street sounds lulled for a minute or two, the melody reached me distinctly. Then I heard Hannah's cautious foot over head, and the stir of a woman who

was in the kitchen at work. I listened in vain for the sound of *his* voice; but as Hannah came to me no more, I conjectured that he still slept.

It was past eight o'clock when the doctor's carriage stopped at the gate: the housekeeper met him at the door, and took him up to her master's room. He was a long time there, during which I sat at the stair's-foot listening, as if by that his report would reach me the sooner. At last he appeared with his naturally cheerful face much overcast. I asked if my seeing Mr. Mayne would be advisable, and he replied hastily, "Not to-night, my dear young lady: in the morning perhaps," and passed out, just as if he were not inflicting on me twelve hours of wasting pain.

Hannah looked graver when I saw her again; and in answer to my inquiries she said, "Miss Kathie, he is just in God's hands. Come your ways now, and you shall see him: he knows you've come."

"But the doctor said, 'Not till to-morrow morning,'" I replied, eager yet hesitating.

“That was for you, not for master.”

She opened the door and went in. It was a large room to the north, and felt cooler than the parlour. Felix lay white and still, like a mask of his former self, with great sunken eyes, and a dark hollow round them. He knew me, smiled faintly, and would have begun to talk, but Hannah laid her finger on her lips.

“Master, if you begin to talk, she must not stay,” was her mandate; and obedient as a child he held his peace, and just looked at me, and I at him.

Hannah brought vinegar to bathe his forehead; and this office she delegated to me at a sign from her master. I liked that he should claim my service; for then I felt it was my place to be there, and that my coming was of use. The very sight of him, altered though he was, comforted me amazingly. I did not see death written on his face, as I had feared.

But later, when I had gone out, and the fever regained its strength, his plaintive, delirious moan seemed to mock my hope. I heard my own name

repeated again and again, in an accent of entreaty; yet when I went and stood by him, and laid my cool hand on his forehead, he asked what waning ghost it was that came when he called for Kathie?

“Kathie has left me; Kathie has left me,” he kept repeating.

“No; she is here, Felix,” I said in my most cheerful tone: “she is watching by you.”

His gaze dwelt vaguely on my face. “You are not *my* Kathie,” was his reply; “my Kathie had a sunshiny look—you are pale: your eyes are heavy with tears. Kathie has left me.”

Then he spoke rapidly about Crofton, and recalled our last evening in the school-room. “Kathie *did* love me: she loves me yet, though she is gone. She has faith in me, she confessed it: she will never forget it.”

Then he seemed to recognise me, and said, “Kathie, after I have served for you all these years, it is cruel—it is cruel to put into my arms this pale Leah, disappointment.”

I felt as if he reproached me—as if he were

uttering some thought that he had long cherished against me; and that his love had striven with in vain. I drew back out of sight, to hide my tears; and he began to talk of Arthur Crawford, as if they were together; then he wandered to his mother, and his own childhood, and back to the time of the fever amongst his people. Hannah made me go away soon, to rest myself; but before I slept, she brought me word that the delirious crisis was, for the present, over; and that her master had fallen into an exhausted slumber.

XIII.

These alternations went on for several days. All the time there brooded over the town a dry, scorching heat; a shadowless sun glared down on the parched earth; the air panted for thirst: all the time the mourners went about the streets; and the slow bell in the church-tower, close at hand, repeated its doleful knell, morning, noon, and night.

I left the house daily for an hour in the cool of the morning, to refresh my oppressed brain and relaxed limbs: the doctor urged it as needful to keep me in health, but it was always a season of deep, aching reflection. What should I do if Felix died? How vacant would the world be to me! how empty, how joyless all its labours and all its cares! Scarcely could I frame a petition for him: my heart yearned with an agony of love to save him, but felt its utter powerlessness even to pray for mercy.

One blazing day I went out through the lanes to the outskirts of the town, and found my way to the river-bank. I sat down on the grassy slope with my feet almost touching the water, and watched the rippled shadows wavering in its depths; watched them through a mist of burning tears. They had told me that morning his life hung on the turning of a hair. For three days he had recognised no one. Only a constitution of iron, the doctor said, could so long have battled with the disease; but even it could not support the wasting fever beyond a certain time.

I struggled with my rebellious heart—struggled to say, “Thy will be done!” but it was with a regretful, impatient submission. My throat swelled; my heart seemed bursting; the pulses of my head throbbed violently.

There were reapers in the fields opposite whistling at their work, and hastening to gather the corn into stooks. I heard one cry out that there would be rain before noon; and lifting my face, I saw clouds coming from the westward, and felt a breath as if the stagnant air were stirred at last. It cooled my head, and filled my heart like a whisper of hope; and when great plashing drops came dancing down upon the river, and the sun was shrouded by a slaty mass of thunder-clouds, I rose up thankfully, and sped back to the Rectory in haste.

Hannah said it was a gracious rain; and that since the west wind began to blow, she thought her master had seemed to revive. The doctor had told us it would be thus.

XIV.

The rain held for many days, and during its continuance Felix sensibly revived. The burning glassiness left his eyes, and a deathly pallor replaced the fever flush. He was a gaunt, hollow-eyed skeleton, very dismal and grim to contemplate; but the fatal shadow that had been lurking about his bed had vanished. We were all recognised and greeted when we came to his room now, and he even began to exhibit some of that wilfulness and perversity of disposition that Hannah asserted had always characterised him. Every day at noon he trailed like a ghost into the adjoining room, which had been temporarily fitted up as a parlour, and there he made me wait on him hand and foot. He was duly exacting, but then he was always pleased and grateful; and be sure, he could ask no service that it did not make Kathie the happier to render. Hannah's office was become almost a sinecure, and his improvement was

so rapid that the doctor began to talk of a removal into the country. Felix did not receive the proposition with favour, for it heralded my return home: he thought he could not bear any change yet; but we all assured him that was a mistake, and that entire submission to authority was most becoming in his present circumstances. Pleasant lodgings were accordingly taken for him at a sea-coast village about six miles from Kingston, and thither he and Hannah removed on the same day that I went back to Eversley. The last evening we had a long talk together, substantially on the same theme as had engaged us so often before.

“Kathie, when you are gone now, I shall feel as if you had belonged to me and somebody had robbed me of you,” he said impatiently. “You have shed the essence of your presence all over the house. I recognise the touch of your fingers in all the decorations of this room: you filled that vase with fresh wild flowers; you grouped those plants in the basket; you arranged the furniture, so that, out of the poorest materials, a pleasant, homelike, cosy room is made for me.”

“ Well, Felix!”

“ I knew who it was that haunted my room with such a pale face, and great, praying eyes: yes, Kathie, I always knew you. Your dress did not rustle or crackle like Hannah’s, and your step was always as soft as the fall of a feather.”

“ Then I shall make a good sick nurse, Felix?”

“ Only to me. Your hand is cool, but it is not steady enough—I have felt it flutter many a time when you laid it on my burning forehead; but for all that your touch quietened me. Kathie, if I were mad I should like to have you near me: I should never harm you.”

I bade him not talk of anything so dismal or I would go away, and presently Hannah coming to ask some question about my departure early the next morning, I bade him good-bye; and in better spirits than I had known for a long while now, went to my pillow. Little thought either of us then what changes there would be ere we should meet again.

XV.

The day after my return home my school reopened. This daily occupation of mine, from which we derived our subsistence, stands rather in the background of this story of my life. But it was, nevertheless, a very tedious task-work to me. Sometimes it fretted and chafed my spirits almost intolerably with its irksome monotony: the dreamy gilding had been long since rubbed off; it was toil—daily and unremitting—nothing else. There was now no time for reading or study; none for the idle luxury of thought: all the trivial details of our maintenance had, by degrees, fallen on me; I was kept down amongst small cares and small economies, and such duties are not, of themselves, improving or exalting.

Another solitary Christmas we kept in the west parlour; another spring came, and went, but brought no change for us. Stephen was still in Penwitham's bank, receiving a large salary; but

he made no advance towards assuming any portion of his pecuniary responsibilities—a result that I had reckoned on almost with certainty. My application that he would do so, he met with a simple refusal: it was quite out of the question that he could do so in his circumstances, he said; and further assured me that the arrangement we had made for the ultimate payment of his debts was ridiculous—we might have been released from that burden long since, but for my stupid folly in resolving that they should be paid to the uttermost farthing, if it took twenty years to do it. I did not think it necessary to tell my mother this; for I felt persuaded in my own mind, that whether our mode of settlement were usual or not, it was at all events the only honest course open to us. We were none of us versed in business affairs, and could only be guided by the common principles of right.

Isabel we had now not seen for two years, but Aunt Aurelia wrote us rhapsodies of her surpassing beauty. They had passed the winter in Paris, and returned to London in May: Isabel was to

be introduced that season, being nearly seventeen. I sighed sometimes to see how swiftly the years were flying, when the child Isabel was almost a woman, and little Jean prided herself on being half an inch taller than Kathie.

XVI.

Midsummer came round again, and my mother expressed an earnest wish to have Isabel at home for a few weeks; but Aunt Aurelia evaded the request, and my sister herself did not seem very anxious for the visit. Her letters to us were frequent, for the child had a good heart; but they were always filled with details of her gaieties and enjoyments—details that presented a forcible contrast to the state of things with us.

“It seems as if she did not belong to us,” my mother said sorrowfully; “as if she never could belong to us any more, Kathie.”

From time to time both my aunt’s and Isabel’s letters had made mention of Mr. Reginald Pompe :

he was a great prize in the "lottery of marriage," being illumined with a golden halo of several thousands a year which he had inherited from an eccentric relative. When at Crofton I had conceived a strong prejudice against this young man—less from his vanity and arrogance, than from the signs of a cruel, harsh, violent temper which he manifested both by word and action. Hannah used to call him an "ill slip," and Miss Bootle always ushered Charlie out of the drawing-room at the Grange when he walked into it. He delighted in tormenting animals and children. If you saw him walk down the village, his riding-whip was always ready for a cut at any unlucky cur or urchin's legs that did not contrive to slink fast enough out of his sight. When, therefore, my aunt asked if I remembered the noble and beautiful youth whom I had seen at Crofton Rectory when I lived with my grandmother, I replied that I did so—very unfavourably. This brought another communication from my aunt to beg that I would not suffer my mind to be prejudiced by the recollection

of any juvenile escapades, for she had reason to believe that Mr. Reginald Pompe was captivated by Isabel, for whom he would be a most excellent match: she further said that it would be very agreeable to my sister and herself if I would spend my holidays with them in town, when I should have opportunities of forming a more favourable judgment of Mr. Reginald Pompe. Though greatly averse to such a journey at that time, my mother persuaded me to take it; that, if possible, Isabel's happiness might not be sacrificed for the sake of a showy connection. We had yet to learn how the child's own affections were disposed towards him, for we had not considered it advisable to broach the subject to her by letter; knowing, as we did, that if her feelings were thwarted she might turn perversely obstinate, and go contrary to all reasonable advice.

XVII.

It was during this journey that I encountered my Crofton friend, Mr. Longstaff. When I got into the coach there was a gentleman sitting by the door, who was sheltered behind a great, brown book which he was intently reading. The guard had just wound his horn, for the first time, when there came panting out of the office a stout, respectable woman with an infant in her arms.

“Here, mon, tak’ th’ wean!” said she to the student in a very Scotch accent.

“I dinna like weans!” responded he, mimicking her voice, and lifting his hands above his head with a gesture of comical repugnance.

“Then it’s time you larnt, mon,” rejoined the mother; and she unceremoniously dropped the little shawled bundle on his knees, hoisted herself up into the vehicle, seated herself opposite to him, and resumed the baby.

I had recognised my old acquaintance the moment his hands went up in the air; and when his stony self-possession returned, he looked coldly at the female who had injured him, and then glanced towards me.

“Ah, Miss Kathie! this is an unexpected pleasure!” he cried, relaxing his grim features, and shaking hands cordially: “I did not observe your entrance into this public conveyance.”

The Scotch dame muttered something about his being as “blind as a howlet, and as unceevil as a bear;” compliments which fell on a deaf ear, but which were certainly not undeserved by a man who could tell a mother he did not like weans.

Mr. Longstaff informed me that he was going into Sussex for the purpose of studying its geological characteristics, with a view to settling there: his sister Theodosia was tired of Crofton, and he himself found the winters cold; but he should not like to live in a district whose component parts were so modern as Adam’s world. He had some specimens of the encrinite in his pockets,

and under the seat several largish slabs of coal with the impressions of ferns in them; and on these he discoursed to me eloquently for the space of two hours, to the great discomposure of the mother, whose wide-eyed baby would listen instead of going to sleep. The child wanted the stones to play with; and when the geologist made himself hard, and the little thing began to yell for disappointment, the mother looked triumphant. But Mr. Longstaff supported the din as if he were a fossil, and merely fenced off the objectionable *wean* with the brown book, and resumed his reading.

When the tempest lulled, he gave me some particulars of Crofton, and its changes. He supposed that I knew Mr. Mayne was gone back to his native place, Kingston. Miss Conolly also had left the village. Mr. Martin's little daughter Rosetta, whom I remembered a child in frilled trowsers and spencer, was a married lady, and lived in the Grange—my grandmother's house. The doctor was growing infirm himself, but he had a son to assist him in his practice. Miss

Palmer had established a boarding-school in Miss Conolly's house; but was not getting forward so well as she had hoped. Dr. Pompe, the Rector, had been made a dean; and his daughter Milicent was supposed to be on the verge of entering a Protestant community of Sisters of Mercy. I was surprised to hear all this gossip from Mr. Longstaff; but I laid it to the account of his confirmed bachelorhood: bachelors being as inveterate gossips as old maids. We travelled to London in company; and having received Aunt Aurelia's address, he said he should do himself the honour of calling upon her, before his return to the north.

XVIII.

My aunt's house was in Curzon-street. I arrived there two hours later than I expected to do, and found that they had given me over for that day, and were dressing for an evening party. Isabel would gladly have stayed at home with

me, but Aunt Aurelia objected; neither did I desire to deprive her of what she said would be one of the pleasantest gatherings of the season. So she took me up to her room, and made me rest on the couch while she went on with her dressing.

But first we had a talk: there were a hundred questions to ask and answer about those at home, and rapid sketches to be given and received concerning the events of the last two years. From a pretty child, Isabel had developed into a beautiful girl: anything purer, brighter, lovelier than she was then, my eyes never saw. Aunt Aurelia had not exaggerated her exquisite grace. I could scarcely satisfy myself with watching her soft, gentle movements. "Oh, Isabel! I wish our mother could see you!" I cried.

"Poor mother! You don't know, Kathie, how like to her you are growing: you have just the same grave brow and solemn eyes. And oh, Kathie, I vow, there is a white hair in your head!" and she took my face in her hands and kissed me.

I cannot tell what there was in the touch of her warm ripe lips that brought the tears in a rush to my eyes; for a minute or two I could not speak, and hid my face amongst the cushions of the couch. Isabel kept her hand caressingly on mine, saying a word now and then to soothe me; when I looked up, at last, her lashes were glittering too.

“Come, Kathie, let us be good,” said she smiling: “I wish I might have stayed with you to-night, but Aunt Aurelia is imperative—”

“Never mind, Isabel; I want sleep to refresh me,” replied I cheerfully. “It is a long journey from Eversley; and to-morrow I shall have forgotten this weakness, when I am rested.”

There was a knock at the door; Isabel opened it, and to my astonishment Milicent Pompe entered.

“Are you ready?” asked she, then advanced into the room and shook hands, remarking that really she should not have known me but that she had been told I was coming, and so it could be nobody else. “Why, Kathie, you look fifty!

I am sure you work too hard; does she not, Isabel?"

They stood side by side whispering for a minute or two, which gave me an opportunity of seeing how time had treated my former rival. Much more kindly than he had treated me: she was still a very handsome woman; her ringlets were as long and glossy as ever; her complexion as brilliant, though less delicate; and her air as light and lively—not much in accordance with my idea of a Sister of Mercy. Her dress was a rich maize-coloured satin trimmed with black lace, and her hair was dressed with flowers of the same tint, mixed with gold leaves, which looked like a paler shade of her bronzed ringlets. Isabel wore a simple white dress, with blush roses amongst the dark folds of her hair; I thought she was like a tall pure lily, and Milicent a gorgeous tropical plant radiating the glow of summer noon.

“Reginald is waiting in the drawing-room, looking at his watch every minute, until you show

him the light of your countenance," said Miss Pompe. "Kathie, order your sister to come away with me immediately: Mrs. Marston is ready, and it is past ten o'clock."

"It seems unkind to leave you, but I suppose I must, Kathie. Good night!" She kissed me twice or thrice, and the maid entering to urge her to hasten, she ran off crying, "I will have you all to myself to-morrow. Good night, and pleasant dreams to you, Kathie!"

A room next to my sister's had been prepared for me; and having had some tea, I went weary to bed. I was awakened out of my first sleep by Isabel's return home towards two o'clock: she came in to me in her white wrapper, with her long hair all hanging down; and saying she was just in the mood for a chat, set down her candle, pulled up an easy chair, and threw herself into it by the bed. I was glad enough to indulge her, for I was really anxious to learn how matters stood betwixt her and Mr. Reginald Pompe. She started the subject herself by saying that Milicent was coming to stay in the house for a few days,

and she was sorry, as she would rather not have had her while I was there.

“ I must tell you that Reginald and I are engaged, Kathie,” whispered she, laying her warm lips on my cheek. “ Don’t look sad or sorry : it is for my happiness ; indeed it is ! ”

Why should she think I had reason to be either? Did she know what I knew of his character, I wondered.

“ Let me kiss this solemn, foreboding smile away ; you will see I shall be happy as the day is long—happy as a queen,” cried she, blushing beautifully. She had made her election, so it was neither advisable nor justifiable to trouble her with doubts of mine ; and I encouraged her to open her heart to me without restraint.

“ People tell me he is not perfection ; but what of that ? ” she said gaily : “ perfection terrifies me ! Milly says he is passionate and stern, but he is not so to me : he loves me too well ever to be harsh to me. And besides, Kathie, his coldness would be sweeter to me than any other man’s devotion. I like him as he is—faulty, quick,

warm, generous, oh! a thousand times better than those icy, methodical souls who are all precision and propriety; who never say or do anything that censure can seize hold of. Don't think me foolish and headstrong, Kathie, don't! It would break my heart to part from him now, and be it fair or be it foul, I am proud and happy to accept my fate whatever Reginald makes it." She had slid down on her knees while making this confession; and now, with her winning eyes looking archly into mine, bade me say that she was wise.

"You will have your share of happiness, Isabel, because it will come out of your own heart," I said.

"And is that all Kathie has to say to me?" she asked wistfully: "nothing in the way of encouragement or congratulation?"

"Oh, Isabel! I pray you may be happy!" I cried, clasping her close in my arms. "I pray you may be happy!"

"I remember that Jean and I used to say you had the gift of second-sight, Kathie; come,

prophecy something good for me — I have faith.”

“Nay, I am as blind as others, Isabel: I do not see either your future or my own, and I do not wish to see them; surely the day’s cares are enough for us.”

I spoke thus because, so far as calculation and presentiment could go, I doubted her chance of happiness very much indeed.

“It is scarcely kind of you, Kathie; I trust your opinion so much: you don’t know Reginald. Well, you shall see him to-morrow.”

She got up and walked away as if offended or grieved, then came back. “Oh, Kathie! I am impatient and wilful, but remember how I used to sympathize with you,” she said rapidly. “I hoped you would cheer me and give me hope, but instead you make me half afraid.”

“Afraid of what, Isabel? I cannot understand that you should fear what you love: what do you mean?”

She stood besides me a few seconds in silence; her eyes were glittering and her lip compressed

under her teeth, to stay its quivering. "But I do love, and I do fear him: I dare not thwart him in the smallest thing," she replied hesitatingly. "I have promised that we shall be married in September, and I want to go to Eversley, and see my mother first—indeed I should like to be married from our home: it would be right, and it ought to be."

"Certainly: my mother will be hurt if you are not. Why should there be any objection?"

"Kathie, you know we are so poor; and though Reginald is very kind, I do believe he is a little ashamed—that is not quite what I mean, he would rather his friends did not know about it—that you keep a little school: and he says it would all come out if he went down to Eversley. You understand me, Kathie: it is not my fault, and you must try to put it in a kinder light to poor mother."

"Oh yes, Isabel, I understand perfectly: it is quite what I expected from Reginald Pompe. But do go back with me for a week or two—Jean

will think it unkind if you do not ; and as for my mother she would be cut to the heart : it would be very neglectful, when she desires it so much."

" But, Kathie, Reginald said absolutely that he did not wish it. What can I do ? Aunt Aurelia thinks it is foolish to be set on it."

" Aunt Aurelia is not your mother : you have a duty to her certainly, but to us first. You must manage it some way : he will yield if you try him ; and if he will *not*—"

" Well, Kathie : what if he will not ?"

" He must be very hard and selfish ; and if I were you, I should have my own way at any rate so long as I was free."

Isabel laughed merrily.

" Kathie, one might fancy that little heart of yours had always kept slow time : yet Aunt Aurelia says—and have not I myself seen ?—your eyes shine and your face flush at the very name of Felix Mayne. What is there that he could ask that you would not long to do ?"

" It is always hard to say him nay ; but I have done it, Isabel. Yours is a fair cause of

revolt; and I encourage you to rebel against unlawful authority."

"I'll think about it. I feel brave enough now, Kathie, but all my courage flies when he bends his brow. And yet I love him!" She stood a minute or so resting her chin on her pretty hand, and repeating the last words over as if the sound of them charmed her. Then she went slowly away to her room without looking at me or speaking any more.

XIX.

The next morning, being up long before anybody else was stirring, and the morning being delightfully fresh and warm, I put on my bonnet, and, under the direction of a housemaid, whom I passed in the hall, found my way to one of the public parks. "The world" was not abroad yet; but there were a few individuals sunning themselves in the broad walks: individuals whom, I felt, were for the time on the down side of

Fortune's wheel—perhaps, who had been under it, and had come up crushed and maimed with many a stain of struggle upon them; men with hungry eyes and hollow cheeks, for whom the battle of life had been one long scene of rally and defeat, but who still kept the ensign of hope fluttering in the wind in the shape of the decent appearance they strove to put on their privations. Many an aspiring youth come to an untimely end in a haggard, disappointed manhood; many a proud, respected manhood quenched in premature, ruined old age were there. Artist, author, broken merchant, pupilless teacher, perhaps, but all telling the same tale by their loitering step and thread-bare garments—"The world has not gone well with us."

It never fell to my lot to remain long in any great city; but what a study to observers who really *observe* must those London streets be.

Perhaps tragedy sweeps by in rich raiment, while comedy, wearing a doleful mask to move tender hearts, trips it on nature's primitive sole; wealth brushes us with a thrifty sleeve, and

waste ambles after clad in gorgeous array; striving, decent poverty creeps uncomplainingly by the wall, and loud, brazen poverty thrusts its sturdy, menacing fist in the face of society.

I wonder whether the world is very unequally dealt: happiness is not, perhaps, after all, a legitimate object of pursuit; but we like the excitement of the chase, and must have game in view. Yet, behold! after we have gone after it thirty, forty, fifty years, what a miserable little fox most people catch! Who has not found his castle in the air, if ever he came to dwell in it, a grand architectural mistake?—gusty, smoky, too big, or too little, out of the reach of friends and acquaintance, or too near them—generally inconvenient, in short; and yet, perhaps, he has spent all his days in laboriously building it up, stone by stone, and after he has taken possession, he hates it worse than a prison.

As in a crowd of fifty thousand faces you find not two alike, so in the hearts of men the aspect of this universally desired happiness differs as much as their features do. To one

idleness and luxury, ease of body and torpor of mind; to another hard work, mental and physical; to a third the laying of house to house, and land to land, and the shutting up of mountains of money in banks where it is of about as much use to its possessor as if it had never been dug out of its native mine—these are three phases of that happiness which might be multiplied *ad infinitum*. Perhaps the commonest is to covet a higher station, though it is pretty generally allowed that happiness lies not in the multitude of things that men have. I myself never saw the rich or the great whose position did not make me more contented with my own: more thankful for the will and power to work independently; and for the distinct line in which my duties lay. My lot had the common cares and common griefs of our nature in abundance, but it lay wide of either dangerous extreme—riches and poverty.

Each in her own way, Isabel and I were intent on bringing happiness home to ourselves; yet I could see distinctly that where my sister was garnering up the precious grain of hope, would be

a black mildew of sorrow and disappointment. I could *see*, but not *avert* it.

She was dressed when I returned home, and met me with the warmest welcome.

“Now I feel sure I have you, Kathie,” cried she. “When I looked into your room this morning and found you flown, I was afraid it was only a dream that I had had last night.”

We breakfasted together, Aunt Aurelia not being up, and then Isabel made me go into the back drawing-room, where her harp and piano were.

“Now I am going to play to you, Kathie: I love music; it carries me away from myself into such a blissful dream-land.”

So she began, and I sat quietly listening. Presently she sang some wild German airs; and then, seeing that I did not care much for them, said, “I know what you like, Kathie, and you shall have them, though they always make me melancholy. Whenever anything recalls to me my home, I remember how wilful I was

about leaving you all, and am half afraid—but a truce to presentiments!”

And she began to sing one of those sweet old English ballads which used to make the west parlour echo when she was a girl at home. They brought all that time very vividly back to my mind, and with its mingled memories a few hot tears. Isabel stopped playing when she saw them.

“Kathie, sisters though we are, how little we know of each other,” said she: “these songs would not have touched you thus a year or two ago. Tell me something about yourself: why have you donned these grey gowns, which Aunt Aurelia calls the livery of spinsterhood? Why is your dear little face growing old before its time? You have had a very short spring, Kathie.”

Short indeed; but I was not there to trouble her young thoughts with my weary ones, so I put the questions aside and spoke of Stephen.

“We see nothing of him now,” said she carelessly; “he is in a different set from ours:

Aunt Aurelia keeps him quite at arm's length. You know, Kathie, anybody may lead him: and from being reckless and wild, he has turned puritanical; and wants to lecture us all. We did not relish it from so faulty an apostle, and declined both his tracts and his advice; so he never comes near us. I have not seen him for a month."

This information certainly surprised me, and I asked more.

"You had better go and see him yourself, Kathie, and try to profit by his preaching. He vexed my aunt very much by saying that our poor mother is too anxious after the things of this world; and that her repeated disappointments on his account had been gracious dispensations to wean her from earthly hopes, and instruments of righteous correction. We thought it disgusting: and when we bade him say no more, he sent us a letter, setting forth his constancy under our persecution, and admonishing us to lose no more time before setting to work to save our souls. You will find him quite changed; whether for the

better or not, I cannot say: charitably we may hope so."

I asked who were his friends.

"They are all of the same stamp: they eschew innocent amusements, glorify themselves, and tremble for the rest of the world. I should say Stephen is a favourable specimen, from what I have seen, for he once induced me to go to his chapel, and introduced me to a family of people with whom he is very intimate. He wanted me to be acquainted with the daughter; but she was a common-place, affected little damsel, and I declined more than distant civilities. I should have thought Stephen was paying his addresses to her if I had not known that he is engaged to Lilius Fenton."

This news made me uneasy; for I knew Stephen's fickleness in his attachments, and also I remembered how mortified he had been at hearing from Paul of his inability to give Lilius any fortune.

While we were still talking about Stephen, my aunt came in, looking very pretty in her morning dress and lace cap.

“My darling, Laure tells me you have ordered yourself to be denied to everybody—is it so?” she inquired, laying her hand on Isabel’s shoulder affectionately.

“Yes; it is Kathie’s first day, and we have so much to talk about.”

“Poor Kathie! you are looking rather worn, I think: you are scarcely recovered from the fatigue of your journey. But, Isabel, she need not care for seeing Mr. Pompe: he is sure to call after luncheon.”

“What do you say, Kathie: shall he be let in?” asked my sister blushing, and glancing shyly at me.

“Yes; I should like to know him better.”

“Thanks! that is my good Kathie! Prepare to lose all your disagreeable old prejudices,” whispered Isabel; then she turned back to the piano and dashed off a lively air.

Isabel’s beauty was truly fascinating. No matter in what costume she was, or in what mood, I always fancied that then she looked the best. At this moment, in a loose muslin dress, simply confined

round the waist with a rose ribbon, her hair folded in glossy braids, her cheek flushed, and her eyes brightened with happy fancies, which found their expression in the wild tunes she was playing. her loveliness exceeded all I had ever seen or read of. Aunt Aurelia left us, and by and by, I think, Isabel forgot that I was there, for she began singing in a soft, low tone, as if to herself. She had passed into her dream-land, and was happy.

Mine, alas! I entered rarely now: it was no longer the charmed region of the unknown and ideal. Time, and experience, and tears had washed the glamour from my eyes, and forced me to see life shorn of its brightest glory. For a long half hour she continued to sing out of her full heart; then rising suddenly, she clasped me in her arms, crying, "Oh, you dear, patient Kathie! would you never have awoke me? I might have gone on crooning my pet tunes till dark, I verily believe, before you would have spoken."

There was a loud ringing at the door-bell. "Who is it—Regy?" added she; and with her

finger on her lip she ran to the front windows and peeped out. "Yes. Kathie, promise to be amiable," supplicated she gravely. "If you are ungracious to him I shall not think you kind to me."

Before I had time to reply, the servant announced Mr. Pompe. He forestalled Isabel's re-introduction by at once claiming me as an old acquaintance, and reverting to the period when I had been at Crofton: it might have been thought that we were quite intimate friends, instead of which I do not think we had ever before exchanged a dozen sentences. I was willing to meet him half way; and it must be admitted that at this meeting he appeared much improved. He was, indeed, an extremely handsome person, very self-possessed, and, when it pleased him, cordial, and apparently frank, in manner. Isabel had taken a seat by the centre window, and he stood with his back to it, the sun shining through his golden tawny hair. When I came to observe his face, and the play of its expression as he talked to my sister, I detected the same arrogant and wily

expression that used to displease me ; but I tried to think the best of him for her sake who loved him.

XX.

That evening I found my way alone to Stephen's lodgings, which were in a retired street a considerable distance from where my aunt lived. He was at home, but I had to wait a short time for his appearance, and beguiled the interval by examining his pictures. One small engraving of a female head, looking out from sombre clouds, with light glancing across the brow and eyes, occupied me when Stephen came in. It was entitled the "Morning Star."

"Kathie, who would have thought of seeing *you* in London?" cried he noisily. "The next news will be that the Minster is taking a walk up Cornhill."

He did not appear very glad to see me ; indeed, a certain coolness had existed between us for a long while, and both were conscious of it.

“ So Isabel is going to be married?” said he. “ You are a long time in getting off, Kathie: Mr. Mayne must be tired of waiting. When is it to be?”

“ I cannot say, Stephen,” replied I, and then turned the conversation on himself, of which engaging person he was nothing loth to speak. I asked an explanation of what Isabel had told me of his change of religious opinions, and of his new acquaintance.

“ A man must amuse himself,” replied he, colouring and laughing confusedly.

To so general a remark I had nothing to say, but almost unconsciously my eyes rested on the “ Morning Star,” and this set him off in full career almost faster than I could follow.

“ Is it not pretty?” cried he, getting up from his chair and standing before the picture. “ Isn’t it a sweet thing, and so like her, Kathie?”

“ Like whom? Like Lilius? I don’t see the resemblance.”

“ Lilius! No, not Lilius—Flora Brunton. By the by, you don’t know her: it was Isabel I introduced her to.”

My brother kept his face studiously averted, but I could tell by his tone that he was doubtful how this subject would be received.

“And who is Flora Brunton?” I inquired.

“Sister to one of Penwitham’s clerks. I am sure you would like her, Kathie; she is a bit of genuine, unspoilt nature: not one of your highly-educated gentlewomen who are fined down until you cannot tell one from another.”

“Oh!” was my dismayed ejaculation.

“She has a nice little fortune of her own—four thousand pounds—and half Penwitham’s fellows are wild about her. I am much to be envied, I can tell you;” and as he jerked out the last sentence, Stephen turned nervously round and faced me.

“I thought greed and vanity were at the bottom of your enthusiasm,” said I plainly; “but how can you reconcile your acquaintance with Flora to your engagement to Lilius Fenton?”

He turned very red, and looked angry. “You seem to think, Kathie, that nobody knows what is right but yourself. Lilius need never know.

I am not going to behave badly to her: don't be afraid."

"I am glad to hear it; but in that case you are playing with this young Flora: she may be misinterpreting your attentions and learning to love you."

"I wish Liliás had Flowy's money, or that Flowy had Liliás's beauty," replied he with unblushing audacity. "Liliás is a pearl, but Flowy is very taking too. I wish you knew her; you would just suit, for she would look up to you, and all that sort of thing. I have talked about you to her often."

"Well, Stephen, I must decline the acquaintance, at present; where do you spend your fortnight's holiday this summer?"

"I have not settled: perhaps I may run down to Eversley, to take a peep at Liliás and my mother: when do you go back?"

"Not for three weeks time. I shall be so glad if you will go with me: it would rejoice my mother greatly. She half hoped you would," said I.

“I’ll think about it, and try to arrange. You see, the Bruntons have planned a trip to Paris, and I almost promised to be of the party. Flowy will be disappointed, but perhaps it would be better to get out of it?” He looked at me questioningly.

“Decidedly better,” I responded.

He began to hum a tune, meantime looking rather sentimentally at the “Morning Star.” “Poor little Flo’, she’ll almost break her heart!” said he with a half smile.

“Break her heart! You must have behaved very cruelly and deceitfully then, Stephen,” interposed I gravely.

“Deceitful and desperately wicked I always was, Kathie, you know. But she is a witch for temper! I wonder what she’d do: storm and rave—yes, that would be it. I’ve seen her in some of her tantrums; she would fly out like a fury and say she hated me.”

He paused for a minute or two, and then with a very serious air introduced the theme of his religious impressions. I listened with

exemplary patience until he began to speak of the spiritual darkness of our home, and his mother's worldly - mindedness ; then I said, "Stephen, if there is one thing more than another that I hate and abominate it is cant and hypocrisy ; the less you depreciate our mother the better : you have for years been our greatest anxiety and care, and I do not think you yet qualified to teach or to preach."

He broke into a loud laugh that jarred unpleasantly on my feelings. "Kathie, you are a regular little shrew !" cried he ; "I thought you would like to hear of my reformation."

"I want to see the signs of it, Stephen : I do not like the piety that consists exclusively in finding motes in our neighbours' eyes."

"Ah, I know where you are ! You are seeking to be saved by works, Kathie, and it is a deadly mistake."

"I am going away now, Stephen ; will you walk with me as far as my aunt's house ?"

No, he could not—he had an engagement ; so we separated rather coldly, and I went home alone.

XXI.

My brief experience of the delights of polite society must needs find a place in this chronicle of my uneventful life, for it served us to talk about in the west parlour for long after. I did not much enjoy my visit to London; being too far removed in mode of life and turn of thought to take real pleasure in those amusements which formed the sum and substance of my aunt Aurelia's existence. Once a fortnight there were miscellaneous gatherings in her drawing-rooms which gave me a glimpse of that great world in which she, an inferior satellite, revolved. There was always a grand crush on the staircase, and the rooms were overcrowded and overheated, so that, at the best, those who came made a toil of a pleasure. It was ludicrous to see stout satin dowagers looking, some laboriously at ease, others crushed and cross, with slender tulle daughters on their arms, making their way with

unconscientious foot and elbow through the press. I must confess that the polite scuffle used sometimes to make me smile: this, I suppose, was that aspect of happiness yclept Pleasure.

At one of these meetings I was re-introduced to Mrs. Pompe, who was attired, as became a dean's lady and the summer season, in ruby velvet and plumed turban. She had to raise her glass before she recognised me, and then graciously patronized me with two limp white kid fingers, which I did myself the honour of shaking. Mr. Longstaff was also present, looking very stiff and solemn against the chimney-piece; and Miss Conolly, more elaborately juvenile than ever, claimed my acquaintance. With her I had conversation.

“My dear Miss Kathie, I am delighted to see you: it really reminds me of old times,” said she, gaily, as if we had been contemporaries. “I presume you have come up to town to be present at your sister's marriage? Ah! what a sweet, lovely young creature she is: so different from Milicent Pompe!” Here the elderly maiden

dropped her voice, and spoke in a confidential whisper. "She will never get off—never! She might sing that innocent little air that used to be a favourite of hers ten years ago, 'Nobody coming to marry me! Nobody coming to woo!' But since people have begun to observe its lively personal application, she has dropped it in public; though I daresay she sighs over it often in private."

Miss Conolly's scandal had lost all its subtle, delicate aroma: she demolished a reputation with a sort of rude, elephantine tramp now; and her acrid spite betrayed itself in the hard sneering lines about her wrinkled mouth.

"Look at Milicent Pompe!" said she, directing my attention to where she stood, the centre of a group of gentlemen. "Is she not faded? And what an expanse of shoulder! She has been to Harrowgate to improve her complexion, and it has not answered. She has been more hawked about than any respectable girl in London, my dear: it is fourteen years since she came out, it is indeed; and she may be on the *tapis* fourteen

years longer, it is my belief, before anybody will marry her. She begins to find her beauty on the wane, and a little while since she retrograded into a sort of chrysalis-pious state; there was actually a report that she was going to retire into a convent; but as that did not create a sensation, and nobody came forward to rescue her from such a fate, she astounded us by assuming the *rôle* of wit and original: the manœuvres of these fashionable women are legion. Positively, Milicent Pompe wears leather boots and a poke bonnet in the mornings, and goes about the streets investigating the condition of the poor, and giving away money and advice when she is at home. It is her good point, that she is generous; let her have her due."

Mrs. Pompe, in deep conversation with Mr. Longstaff, passed near us: Miss Conolly shivered, and craned up her neck severely. "My dear, it gives me a sort of *creeping feel* to see a woman of Mrs. Pompe's age and position, laying herself out to catch the admiration of single men. What a singularly coarse-featured person she is! Ah!

if the poor, dear, confiding Dean knew! Well, well! we live in strange times; we shall see what we shall see! She reminds me of the figure-head of a French ship of war '*la Jézèbel*,' that I once saw in Brest harbour."

Miss Conolly spoke with acrimonious vivacity; no doubt the two ladies had quarrelled, and hated each other with genuine feminine spite. Mrs. Froude, a sharp-featured, hungry-eyed woman, the mother of three unmarried but eligible daughters, whose acquaintance I had made at Crofton, checked Miss Conolly's criticisms by claiming me with demonstrative eagerness. "Miss Brande, I ought to congratulate you on your beautiful sister's great match," said she, with an affectionate or affected frankness; "but you know me: I am a person who speaks her mind, and sincerely, my dear, I cannot use the usual complimentary phrases on this occasion."

She sat down beside me, and cast up her eyes pensively. It is a weakness of mine to shrink from an individual who prefaces a conversation with the information that he or she is candid, and

will speak his or her mind: I know beforehand that something ill-natured is coming. But escape now was impossible, edged in as I was; and besides, in her ardour, Mrs. Froude had taken my hand, and did not relinquish it until she had said her say.

“Mrs. Marston is the person to be blamed for encouraging the attachment,” whispered she, lugubriously: “she knows the sort of life Mr. Pompe has led, and the character he bears. Even his best friends say he has the very—well—a temper! I must tell you, my dear—about a year ago he was much struck with my innocent little Emmy; but she used to cry when he was mentioned, and say, ‘No, mamma, no! I would rather marry a porcupine! He is always bristling up his quills!’ Dear Emmy is *so* witty and lively.”

“It is a remarkable fact, that Mr. Reginald Pompe’s engagement to Isabel Brande should have brought his manifold iniquities to light,” remarked Miss Conolly sarcastically: “we never heard of them until he ceased to be an object of competition.”

Mrs. Froude vouchsafed no reply to this

inuendo. "It is sad that so fair and good a young creature should be sacrificed to such a man," said she, pitifully: "my heart aches for her. Ah, Miss Brande! is it impossible to detach her from him even now?"

"Quite impossible, Mrs. Froude!" interjected Miss Conolly with glee: "all the arrangements are made, and the settlements are being prepared."

I could not contradict it. Mrs. Froude groaned, and the spinster lady said she was sure it was a disappointment.

"There is quite a mercantile spirit prevailing amongst worldly people regarding matrimonial alliances in our day," observed Mrs. Froude, pathetically. "Not that I mean to suggest that either Mrs. Marston or your sister has been actuated by so miserably mean a motive as Mr. Pompe's six thousand a year; far be it from me to insinuate such a suspicion! But *my* dear children should never be made articles of barter—never!"

"Oh, Mrs. Froude! I am glad to hear *you* say

so!" said Miss Conolly derisively; "for I have always thought that if Satan himself were to visit the shades of Almack's, his horns invested with strawberry leaves, and calling himself Duke of Viledurance, there would be found mothers willing to give him their youngest and fairest to wife, and daughters eager to accept the position."

"Oh, shocking! monstrous!" murmured Mrs. Froude; "such persons must be quite lost to a sense of propriety." And with a mildly keen glance round the room she left me, and wound her way through the crush into the back drawing-room, where her innocent Emmy was flirting with a little ensign of eighteen, to the young gentleman's great danger and confusion.

"Now, my dear, I will just tell you how it is, that Mrs. Froude is so intensely spiteful about Reginald Pompe," said Miss Conolly in her confidential whisper: "not that I wish to contradict what she says about his badness; but the fact is she has thrown her daughters at his head one after the other in the most barefaced way, and

now everybody is diverting themselves with the sight of her mortification and failure. First, she tried him with Sybil, who is the beauty of the family; then the innocent Emmy had her chance; and lastly Kitty, the lively and hoydenish, sought to captivate him. It was aggravating that the three varieties should fail, certainly; but it is very bad policy in Mrs. Froude to go about exposing the girls' stratagems by abusing the Pompes to everybody who will listen to her. But she is a queer woman—a very queer woman. It is generally supposed that she sleeps with one eye open, ready to take advantage of every opening in the matrimonial market; and some very wild speculations her energetic spirit has led her into. Really, my dear, the history of her blunders might lay the foundation for a new Comedy of Errors."

While Miss Conolly was thus holding forth on the faults and foibles of her friends, Aunt Aurelia passed us on the arm of a tall, dark-faced military man, with grizzled hair, and an immense moustache. Mr. Longstaff followed them into the

small boudoir which opened from the front drawing-room, and there the three held a long conversation.

“Who can he be?” Miss Conolly said, half to herself. “I feel sure I have seen his face before: my dear, do you know who that is talking to Mrs. Marston?”

I replied that nearly all the people present were strangers to me, but that I thought the grey officer had a look of Mr. Longstaff.

“You are right! it is Wilfred Longstaff! it is the colonel! How cheerful your aunt looks; my dear, I should never be surprised if those two were to marry even now.”

I asked an explanation.

“Wilfred Longstaff was your aunt Aurelia’s first love: I quite well remember the time they were separated, and he went to India. To think that they should meet and be on such excellent terms! But it is very well known that she was not happy in her marriage. I must go and speak to the Colonel; dear me, I remember giving him sugar plums when he was a little boy!” And Miss

Conolly, for once free from spleen and spite, meandered into the boudoir, and claimed her ancient friend. He seemed to receive her very graciously; and when she returned to her seat by me, I observed that she did not speak another ill-natured word all the evening.

My aunt's face was quite changed as she talked to the rather grim-looking colonel: its expression of lassitude and discontent had vanished, her pretty eyes shone pleasantly, and her colour was a little raised by the excitement of the meeting, perhaps. I had never seen her look so well. She did not make that common mistake of dressing to look younger than she was; she could not seem a girl in her fresh spring, but she was altogether the gentle, graceful, and gracious woman of summer age. The Colonel twirled his long, grey moustache, and eyed her admiringly: it was easy to see that he was as much in love with her as ever. I was very glad when my aunt sent Mr. Longstaff for me, and introduced us: I liked his face, and I liked too that my aunt Aurelia should look so happy, and that for once a long

fidelity should come before my eyes, and be acknowledged and rewarded.

The elder Longstaff, my geological friend, looked half bewildered, but very benign. He talked to himself, a little to my amusement. "Theodosia will be delighted: I should not wonder if she consented to stay at Crofton. It will give her something to think about and arrange. Dear Tedo! I must carry the news to her to-morrow, and Wilfred may follow me down," said he in an under tone. Then suddenly catching my eye, he added, "Miss Kathie, can I carry any message for you to your grandmamma?" He stopped, turned a dull red, and stammered an apology. "Ten thousand pardons! it was quite inadvertent, I assure you—quite inadvertent. My brother Wilfred's unexpected arrival has driven nearly everything else from my memory." He rubbed up his obstinate hair, and stood very erect, as if trying to collect his stray faculties; but from moment to moment a smile expanded his grim features, as if his satisfaction were too lively for suppression.

"He is my youngest brother, Miss Kathie,"

said he in an explanatory tone. "When he went away to India he was a smooth-faced, slim young fellow, and look at him now. Theodosia will say he looks older than I do, but it is the climate that has done it; yes, the climate—nothing else."

The old soldier—he looked old, though he was considerably under fifty—was leaning over the sofa on which Aunt Aurelia sat, whispering to her, and she was blushing like a girl.

"Ah!" said Mr. Longstaff, "he might have come home ten years ago. All would have been right: we told him so; but Wilfred always had a spice of obstinacy in his character, and would not believe us. I wonder what Tedo will say."

He was talking to himself again, so I took advantage of his abstraction to slip away to Isabel, and communicate the intelligence; for she was watching my aunt and Colonel Longstaff very curiously.

"I know all about it," said she as I came up. "Miss Conolly has been overflowing to Milicent and me for the last ten minutes, and now she has

gone off to enlighten Mrs. Froude. Look at that lady's round-eyed astonishment!"

The rooms were now comparatively empty; party after party went away until only the Pompes and Longstaffs remained. Mr. Reginald was in a very gloomy mood: something had evidently offended him.

"Regy looks stormy—what has happened?" Milicent whispered to me. I could not tell. "It is lucky for Isabel that she loves him as she does," she added; "for there is every probability of her being well tried with him. She has had warning enough, so it is with her eyes open that she walks into the snare. I may say it to you, Kathie Brande, because you know him; but he can be very hard and selfish: encourage your sister to hold her own will at any rate till they are married. We all see that she fears as much as she loves him; and my anticipation is, that the love will evaporate by and by, and leave only the fear behind."

"I hope she will be happy—all these warnings come too late: matters must take their course now," I replied quietly.

“Very true. For my part, I consider it an immense risk to marry anybody. Only think of sitting opposite the same face at breakfast three hundred and sixty-five times a year. Positively, one had need start with a large stock of love and esteem, for it must be awfully monotonous.”

Mrs. Pompe admonished her daughter that it was time to go.

“I am coming with my trunks to-morrow,” said Milicent. “Then you and I can have some long chats: I am an inveterate gossip. Oh! Regy is making it up with Isabel. I wonder what they quarrelled about. The Longstaffs are going, too. Isn’t it delightful to see anybody look so happy as Mrs. Marston does? Good-night!”

My aunt disappeared with the last guests; and thinking she might not care to see us again just then, Isabel and I went up to our rooms.

“Oh, how tired I am!” cried my sister, throwing herself upon the couch with an air of weariness and vexation. I asked what ailed her.

“I cannot go to Eversley, Kathie,” replied she. “Reginald will not hear of it, and I promised not

to tease any more about it. You must explain it to my mother, and don't let her think hardly of me. I am disappointed, but there is reason in what he says——”

“What does he say: I should like to know what reason there is in denying you the sight of your mother?”

“Well, Kathie, we cannot expect him to understand our old-fashioned ways of thinking. It does not grieve *him* not to see his family: the Pompes don't seem to care for each other. He abuses Milicent, and Milicent abuses him.”

“It is two years since my mother saw you, Isabel.”

“Yes; I know it is. But I have a plan: I will come after I am married, before we go abroad—quietly for a day or two. I will tell you what he says, Kathie, and it is sensible enough. You are at home in very poor circumstances, and people might expect him to do something for Stephen and set you free; but he has made up his mind not to be burdened with poor relations, and he wishes, therefore, to keep clear of my family. He would

never let me introduce Stephen to him, and can you wonder at it?"

For a minute or two I said nothing: what Isabel now declared, I had all along suspected to be the case; but it was disagreeable to hear it stated. "He need be under no apprehensions: we should never trouble him," I at length replied. "It is a mere excuse: oh, Isabel! I wish you had never seen him! I wish you had never seen him!"

"Somebody has been filling your ears with their poisonous slanders!" cried she; her beautiful, wilful face crimsoning with anger. "It is not kind in you to receive them as true. People have done their duty in warning me, without setting you against him. If he has been extravagant, what of that? Look at our own Stephen: at least, Reginald has not made his family suffer by his follies. I am sick of being told of his irregularities; and I hold no person my friend who persists in abusing him."

She turned away petulantly. I begged her not to be angry with me; and putting my arm

round her neck, drew her face to mine to kiss her.

“Isabel, you know I love you: I would suffer anything for you, if you could be saved from this marriage,” I said gently.

“You are talking nonsense, Kathie! Nobody knows better than you that we don’t suffer by proxy in these cases,” replied she, with bitterness.

“I must speak, sister—I must; though you should hate me for it. Is he not unprincipled, passionate, cruel, jealous as people say? Oh, Isabel! go home with me: I know this marriage will work nothing but misery for you!”

“Is that all? Have you said enough, Kathie?” exclaimed she; rising up proudly, and pushing me away; “are there any more wicked, injurious things you would like to repeat to me. I tell you once for all, I would willingly die for Reginald: there is not a creature in the world I value in comparison with him—not one! Now, go away: I want to be alone.”

She stood up a few paces from me with her hand extended to repulse me; her cheek blazing,

and her eyes full of a dark fire. It was useless then to strive with her resentment, and I crept away as she bade me, weeping, to my chamber.

XXII.

The next morning she came to me early : she had been crying too, and her eyes were red. "Kathie," she began, laying her hand on my neck, "Kathie, don't talk to me about Reginald any more in your cold, icy way : it tortures me ; I cannot bear it. I want to love you, and I want you always to love me ; but it cannot be if you take against Reginald. I will not hear him aspersed, and be silent. I cannot be patient even with you, though I know you are right to speak out. You mean it for the best, Kathie, but it is of no avail. I am proud of my bondage ; I am a contented slave. What is the use of pointing to liberty when I like my captivity better ? Ah, Kathie ! there is a very loud, beating heart under your grey gown that ought,

from its own experience, to know better than to try to make me turn traitress to my love." She kissed me, and thus ended our last dispute on the subject of her marriage.

During the morning, Milicent Pompe came with all her baggage, as she said, for a week's stay at my aunt's house. The Dean and his wife were gone to Cheltenham, whither she was to follow them when her visit was at an end. When she learnt that Isabel had given up her intention of going to Eversley, she took her to task much more severely than I had ventured to do.

"You little foolish child! I thought you had twice as much character: why Reginald can knead you like clay into any mould he pleases," cried she. "What do you mean by letting him have his own absurd way: you scarcely dare say your soul is your own!"

Isabel pouted, and bade Milicent be still: "No; I have got a little story to tell you; and I hope it may be a warning to you," continued the young lady. "Yesterday I went with mamma to call on the St. Barbes. You know Mrs. St. Barbe—a fair,

delicate woman, who always dresses in blue? Well, while we were talking, her lawful spouse came in, arrayed from head to foot in white calico, with a red scarf of his wife's tied round his waist, and a fez cap on his head. He has recently grown an immense black, brushy beard; it nearly comes up to his eyes; and he squints over it in the most fiendish manner. Now, six months ago, his innocent little wife unfortunately made a remark to the effect that she disliked beards and clarionet-players. He immediately purchased four clarionets; and ever since has practised on each of them daily in her drawing-room for three hours. The beard was not to be had at a moment's notice, but he has spent a little fortune on the fertilizing unguents which are advertised in the papers, for the purpose of bringing it to perfection. There are persons who say that he does not squint by nature; but has just taken up the trick to aggravate Mrs. St. Barbe. And Reginald is quite capable of learning to squint and blow the clarionet to vex you, Isabel, if you encourage him in his Turkish ways.'

My sister laughed, and said she thought such monstrosities were ground enough to sue for a divorce.

“But divorces are expensive luxuries: much better try the effect of a little timely rebellion. Pack up your box and run away to Eversley with Kathie. Reginald will not be half so tyrannical after you have shown your independence.”

I advised the same; but Isabel shook her head.

“No, no, no! I will not hear you,” she cried, stopping her ears.

“I am afraid you have only half a grain of proper spirit,” returned Milicent: “but wilful woman will have her way.”

My aunt came in, and took Isabel away for one of those consultations which were now frequent: making bride’s clothes was again going forward.

Milicent asked me, when they were gone, if there had been any announcement yet about Colonel Longstaff: there had not.

“We all think that they will be quietly married immediately Isabel leaves your aunt,” said she. “The Colonel has been in town a month, but they had not met till last night; and when he came here with a friend, he did not actually know that Mrs. Marston was his old love. I remember him quite well when I was a little girl: he was an extremely handsome person, and very much attached to your aunt. She was always pretty. I like to see people made happy, and that is a marriage it will give me pleasure to witness. There is quite an old-fashioned devotion in Colonel Longstaff’s manner to your aunt. I wish Regy treated Isabel with half as much tenderness.”

I expressed some surprise that my sister should be so blindly attached to Reginald as to give up her own will to him as she did.

“I wondered, too, at first; but now I understand it perfectly,” replied Milicent. “She is headstrong and wilful: a timid lover she would have trifled with, tortured, and rejected; but to Regy’s impetuosity she succumbed at once. She

had met her master, and acknowledged him. If he were as faithful as he is fond, and as tender as he is jealous, she would be a happy woman; but I greatly fear her experiences will have partaken of the bitter waters of strife before she has been his wife a year and a day. She will not like the curb always, poor Isabel! but she has a high spirit of her own when it does break out, and perhaps it may keep him a little in check."

XXIII.

My aunt Aurelia occasionally gave musical parties to a select number of her friends; and one of these took place whilst I was in town. Colonel Longstaff came, the Pompes, the Froudes, and several other people, useful as singers or listeners. Amongst the latter I saw Miss Wilton, whom I had known at Crofton. She looked a shade more eccentric than formerly, but was still talkative and good-humoured. She said she had under-

stood that I was engaged to Mr. Mayne: and, from that text, expatiated diffusely on his genius, pronouncing herself one of his warmest admirers.

Milicent Pompe joined in her praises so gracefully, as to show that long since all pique on her own account had been forgotten. She wore her most benevolent expression, which, Miss Wilton bade me observe, indicated that she was on evil thoughts intent. When she left us she glided to that part of the room where the harp and piano were.

My aunt always tried to obtain for her parties somebody new and attractive. This evening it was a Mr. Candish—a stately, handsome person, and an eldest son in possession of a fabulous fortune. Rumour said that he had turned eyes of favour on Milicent Pompe and Sybil Froude, between whom an unexpressed, but deadly, rivalry had in consequence arisen.

The group was elegantly posed. Sybil, soft, white and downy as a puff-ball, leant over the harp with picturesque grace; her slender rose-tipped fingers, rounded arm, dimpled elbow, and

full marble shoulder, called not in vain for admiration; whilst her animated, confiding countenance, slightly turned towards Mr. Candish, beamed with tender and warm feeling. Mr. Candish stood by the chimney-piece with his fine, weary, chestnut head thrown back, and his half closed eyes emitting that melancholy, treacherous glance, subtly dangerous to some women as the serpent-ray in Eden was to Eve. He admired Sybil: every envious dowager in the room saw it; Milicent Pompe saw it, and was glad: for Sybil and she had dissembled rage in their hearts, and a sweet revenge was preparing. This mephistophelian friend stood behind the singer clad in black lace, with carnations in her hair and bosom, and served as a foil to the fair and unsuspecting Sybil. Her plans had been laid with cruel accuracy, so as to preclude all possibility of failure.

Sybil Froude had a peculiarity—let us speak of it delicately, and call it a peculiarity—to some it might be a charm: when in repose her brilliant sea-grey eyes were clear and beautiful; but when

she was thwarted or disturbed, they squinted. It was a nervous affection. The amiable Milicent knew this: which of her friend's vulnerable points knew she not indeed? She was aware also that Sybil objected to having her music looked over, lest anybody should choose the same pieces, and make it common; and therefore, with obtrusive rustle, while the victim was singing most pathetically the first verse of her song, she began to furl over the leaves and murmur the names, as if learning them by heart.

Sybil heard and saw, but it was impossible for her to check the obnoxious proceeding without breaking off.

Mr. Candish's penetrating gaze was on her face: first the beautiful colour forsook her cheek, then a green flickering danced under her eyelids, and next her obliquity of glance became painfully distinct.

Mr. Candish straightened himself up out of his languid attitude, and stared at her like a basilisk. The transformation was something

marvellous ; and really most entertaining to initiated spectators of Milicent's faction.

As the song ended, Milicent closed the music-folio with emphasis, and said to her friend benignly, " I am afraid you are not well, dear ? "

The words were meant for the censorious, for people in general, but the smile that accompanied them was patent only to the initiated.

Being interpreted, it signified, " Mistress Sybil, you impertinently laughed at and depreciated me, and I have punished you : you are so nervous and angry now that you will squint all the rest of the night, and Mr. Candish will never admire you again. "

Sybil looked downwards with a touching shyness as she left the harp, but Mr. Candish did not draw near to compliment her : he was stroking his moustache, and gazing meditatively at the ceiling.

Sybil slid her hand forgivingly within the arm of her treacherous friend, and went into the

inner drawing-room, whence she only re-appeared to go away.

“For an indolently good-natured woman, Milicent Pompe can do most spiteful things,” remarked Miss Wilton, who had taken a mischievous interest in this little by-play: “I should not care to excite her enmity. What a satisfied expression there is in her face! what triumph! Well, I hope Mr. Candish will not fall into her hands, for he deserves a better fate.”

As neither Miss Wilton nor Mr. Candish ever crossed my path after this evening, and disappear henceforward from this history, I may as well state here that some ten years later they married, to everybody’s violent astonishment, and went to live at Florence, where their entertainments became very popular, both amongst English and foreign residents.

XXIV.

During the week of Milicent Pompe's visit, there was an incessant round of gaieties going on; Aunt Aurelia, Isabel, and she went out together, and I stayed at home writing long letters to my mother and Felix, or sometimes talking to Stephen, who came when he knew I was alone. He did not give me the benefit of any more spiritual advice, neither did he again introduce the subject of Flora Brunton; he was, indeed, brimming with pleasure at the idea of going to Eversley and seeing Lilius. He actually talked about hastening his marriage, if Paul Fenton's consent could be obtained; "for you know, Kathie, I shall do much better when I am settled," said he.

Stephen always acted from impulse, instead of principle; so when the impulse was good I was glad to encourage it, and did so now. I hoped, too, that his going home with me might soften my mother's disappointment about Isabel; for

after all was said and done to obtain a reversal of Mr. Pompe's decree, I was obliged to return to Eversley without her.

Our parting was much quieter and sadder than it should have been: both felt a separation at that time unnatural; but Isabel sought to cheer me, and flatter herself, by promising that she would come upon us some day in the west parlour unawares, and by anticipating the joy of such a meeting. I had not much faith in this prospect myself, or indeed in anything that depended for its accomplishment on the will of Reginald Pompe.

I think Jean was more grieved than my mother at Isabel's non-appearance; or, at least, she said much more about it. There was a touching self-reproval in what my dear mother observed: "I did wrong to give my child away out of my own hands, Kathie," said she: "we might have struggled on all together, and I had no right to allow my responsibility to be assumed by your aunt. Isabel cannot have the love for us that she would have felt if I had kept her; perhaps, it is

just that I should suffer for the neglect of my duties in the loss of her affection.”

But I persuaded her to think that the child did not act from inclination in staying away, and that nothing could exceed her love for all of us. Yet even that was cold comfort to her mother's yearning heart.

XXV.

A few days after we came home, Lilius Fenton arrived blushing, to tell me that Stephen had at last obtained her father's consent to their marriage soon after the next Christmas; and she made me promise that after he returned to London I would assist her with my advice in preparing for the event. Talking of this made me think of my own wedding clothes, lying half-made in the drawers up-stairs; and when Lilius was gone home I went to my room with the intention of turning them over—a thing I had never done since they were put away. Jean came to watch me.

“What a smell of death amongst that linen, Kathie! What things are they?” said she, carelessly.

“Don’t you remember, Jean? They were put away two springs ago; they are damp, and it is the lavender that gives them the smell you feel.”

She looked at me sorrowfully, but I was quite unmoved. Rarely, very rarely, was Felix Mayne’s name mentioned amongst us. Regularly as Thursday morning came round, Ann brought me in his letters; I retired to my closet to read them; there also were they answered, and there whatsoever agonies or repinings I went through during those waiting years were hidden. They thought, perhaps, I was content thus to wear away my youth. It was my object that they should think so. Wherefore should we intrude our private sufferings on others, who can neither share nor ameliorate them? It is only just to bear our own burdens, without seeking to transfer them to other folks’ shoulders: every heart has its own bitterness, and that is enough for a common human heart; there never was but One

who willingly endured sorrows and griefs not his own.

It was at this period that Felix sent me a book of his. Both Mr. Withers and Francis Maynard told me that it had raised his name from that of an undistinguished country clergyman, to the first ranks of his country's genius. I heard it with a thrill of pride. Had I not a right to be proud of his success?

I carried the book to the painted window one glowing August evening to enjoy it; my cheeks burnt, my fingers quivered with excitement as I divided the pages. Yes; the smallest thing that affected Felix stirred me to my heart's core. How much more, then, this fulfilment of those dreams that he had suffered me to share! Would he seem the same in this utterance of his soul as he seemed to me?

I began to read. Did he think thus and thus? This deep knowledge of life, this cutting sarcasm, this cruel irony were all strange. Had he these moments of world sickness such as were depicted? Had he thus prematurely come to the conclusion

that there is no profit in anything under the sun?

I closed the book weeping. It saddened me inexpressibly: it seemed as if my grandmother's warning were repeated to me; as if I were to blame for the darkened life that reproached me in the eloquent page.

It was nearly two years since we had met: for me those years had done nothing. I was faded and worn; all the little grace that youth had lent me was gone: at twenty-four I was a pale, hollow-chested woman, while most of my sex are still in their best days. I think if we had come upon each other by chance, Felix would not have recognised me. The grey calm of my existence, so different from the stir of his, was becoming like a gulf between us. There was one bright spot in my week—his letters: all the rest was chill and dim as November. I could not say that I was unhappy; my cup lacked the last bitter drop; for weary as I oft-times was, there was this recollection to fall back upon—Felix loved me. And in my heart the tie was as strong

as ever: time had stolen from it nothing. My sorest struggle was against my own selfishness; it was palpable that I was wrong thus to hamper him with my unfulfilled promise. I ought to have cancelled it when Stephen left college. The first wrench would have been an agony to both, but calm would have come at last, and our other duties might have better sufficed us. As it was, we had referred so many things to the time when we should be together; a pleasure coming in my way by chance, was passed as not worth seizing; but on the other hand, troubles were robbed of half their weight by the remembrance that Felix's love was mine still.

As I held that book in my hand, I felt shivered up—chilled. Ah! it is a pitiful moment, that moment when the first doubt of our power, over one we idolize, comes whispering to the shrinking heart that its labour is all weakness, and that it is falling slowly, slowly, yet surely asunder from what it leaned upon. That whisper came to me then.

XXVI.

That book was my companion for many days. I read and re-read it to conjure a gentler meaning out of its utterance. It was a very hard parable to me. As I knew Felix, he was kind of heart, generous, forgiving, faithful; he could not have written thus when a young man. It seemed like the outpouring of one who has gone about striving to work, and work well, but who has met with discouragement, ingratitude, and disaster, and who pauses and asks doubtfully, "Who will show me any good?" It was eloquent, forcible, and true as an expression of one phase of the writer's mind; but it gave me no adequate view of the greatness and strength that were in him. These dark thoughts would never, perhaps, have become articulate if his course had been earlier marked with success. The trail of bitterness and disappointment was visible amidst the purest, loftiest

aspirations. The man seemed to remember himself and his vain seekings in the ardour of new labours; to clutch cold truth with naked grasp, looking back wistfully all the while at old visions drifting away into the mists of the unreal. He had hoped more than ten men—even ten angels—could accomplish, and from a blind faith he had passed into a hard cynicism. Still he was longing to believe in the Good and the Beautiful, while in this chill, exceptional, and transitional mood, such as shrouds, once in their lives, all who think and feel, he asks, “Where are they? I have sought in vain: I cannot see them.”

But this dreary cloud would pass soon: his work, being done aright, must have a true issue, though he might not see it; for our work is eternal, whether it be careless, incomplete, selfish work, or profitable, straightforward, honest work. What we do, and how we do it, we must carry whither we shall go, to our shame and confusion, or to our honour. We may be impatient for results, we may demand to see the fruits of our labours, and be disappointed; but if we can lay it

to our conscience that, according to our talent, we have striven our best, there need be no harassing fear that we have sown our ground with salt instead of grain: if we do not harvest it, God's angels will, and we shall find it safely garnered up against our day of account. "Do thou thy work: leave its results to Time."

Felix in that book, perhaps, to some appeared wise in the wisdom of this world; to me it seemed as if he had looked at life through a mist of his own raising, which warped things out of their true proportion. By and by I felt sure that mist would clear away, and that he would see the distortion of his views, and finally acknowledge that Duty, Love, Faith, Patience, Labour, are things actual and eternal—moral senses as truly existent as our physical senses. But meanwhile he was weary—he was desponding; and I—I who did so love him—was one cause. What could I do to amend the wrong? Nothing but what would at first sight seem a yet greater wrong. Through the mechanical round of my daily duties was one glistening thread—must I, *must* I sever it? I could not:

the days were so joyless, so blank but for it. "Let me hope on a little longer," I earnestly prayed.

XXVII.

The time for Stephen's return to London drew on fast. He had been at home a fortnight, and his last evening was to be spent with some of his old schoolfellows who lived in the town. The afternoon of that day he passed with Liliás; and when he came in at seven o'clock to dress, he called me into his hutch to speak to him.

"Kathie, you will go in to see Liliás while I am away," said he. "Really the little thing loves me very much. Do you know, I left her crying, and she has been fancying I don't care for her as much as I did. Mind you have her here often."

I promised, and he told me that he had deferred his leave-taking till the morning.

It was, as usual, very late when he came home that night; my mother had gone up-stairs, and I waited for him alone. Presently after one o'clock

I heard snatches of a song in the court, and going in haste to the door, admitted Stephen—I am almost ashamed to write it—excessively drunk. The object he presented to my eyes was not a pleasant one: his countenance was flushed and stupid; and what was my disgust when I learnt from his disjointed, maundering talk, that he had been to Paul Fenton's house in that plight, and that Liliás herself had refused him admittance.

“Pale-faced little jade!” stuttered he, with the addition of an imprecation that it is needless to quote; “she'll never treat me with such cursed coolness again. I shan't get those fellows' jeers out of my mind for a twelvemonth, though she did let them know how she dotes on me.”

He burst into a dreadful, drunken laugh, and his face expressed a savage resentment. It is impossible for me to render his exact words, clipped as they were, as they drivelled from his lips; but my brother though he was, they fired me with indignation and disgust.

“‘Do go home, *dear* Stephen, do go home,’” murmured he in a drunken imitation of Liliás's

tone. “‘*Dear* Stephen!’ Bah! I hate her sickly voice. And then the little fool would go and cry herself to sleep, curse her! And to-morrow she will be watching for me ready primed with gentle rebukes and tearful expostulations. Ay, Mistress Liliias, but you will wait a long while before you will get my ears to listen to you.”

It would have been breath wasted to reason with Stephen in that condition; so, extinguishing the candles, I left him to his cool repose on the floor, and went to bed quite heart-sick.

The following morning I was up in good time to finish packing Stephen’s luggage, but he himself did not appear until the porter from the coach office came for his things, and then he complained of wretched headache. I expected to see him snatch up his hat and run over to Paul Fenton’s if it were but for five minutes; but instead he sat down, ate a hearty breakfast, and rushed up-stairs to bid my mother, who was not yet risen, good-bye. He came back into the parlour ready to start, gathered up his

cloak, and kissed Jean and me, as we followed him into the court.

“Have you no word for Liliás, Stephen?” I whispered.

“Not one: let her remember her conduct last night. If you like the office, you may make her know that our engagement is at an end, but I believe she understood me well enough. She never half loved me, and I don’t care for her as much as I did when I was a lad. But I’d have married her notwithstanding her want of money if she had not treated me so shamefully—but good-bye, or I shall be too late and miss the coach.”

My blood boiled with indignation at Stephen’s unworthiness, and I followed the first promptings of my anger by inditing to him a strong letter of remonstrance and rebuke, which I proposed should follow him to London; but on reflection I destroyed it: quite sure that Liliás’s happiness could never be safe in such hands.

I heard nothing of her during that day or the following one, but on the third Ann told

me that she had met Miss Fenton, who inquired if Stephen had gone to London, and seemed surprised when told that he had left two days before. I now dreaded a meeting with her; and though, during the ensuing week, she came several times, and went up to the hutch, where my mother sat in school-hours, I avoided seeing her by staying amongst my scholars. It was not until more than a fortnight had elapsed that I saw her, and then she sent a message to desire me to go to her father's house that evening, as she wished to talk to me and could not go out. That morning we had received a letter from Stephen giving us a tolerably comfortable account of himself, but making no mention of Lilius; this omission my mother immediately observed, and I was obliged to explain to her the reason of it.

Paul Fenton was asleep in his chair when I went in, and his daughter took me up to her own room that we might not disturb him. She looked eager for news, but did not ask it; she began by telling me of what Stephen had done,

not alluding to his disgraceful condition, but stating only the lateness of the hour as her reason for refusing to admit him. There was a slight tinge of displeasure in her tone as she spoke of his behaviour, and I doubted not that this displeasure had been, at first, as keen as it was just; but a fortnight's silence had somewhat abated it.

“We heard from Stephen this morning,” said I, compelled to speak by her questioning eyes. She felt all was not right; and to gain a little courage to ask what, she took an old casket from the table and began to show me its contents—some very ancient ornaments in gold filagree that her father had given her. I pretended to be admiring them, thinking in my own mind all the time how I should fulfil my task of undeceiving her.

It was a very sunny June evening, and through the low lozenge-paned window there came a flood of soft purple light; Lilius stood where it shone all about her, and surely anything more fair or fragile summer sun never fell

upon. Her hair hung in long waved tresses, bright as threads of pale gold, and her dress was some rich lustrous stuff, shot with violet and amber. A deep rose burnt on her cheeks, and her eyes were vividly and restlessly glittering, as her nervous fingers toyed with the narrow velvet clasped with Stephen's gift round her slender throat.

"Kathie, will you tell me what he said about that night—was he very angry?" she asked tremulously.

"*You* might have been so with reason, Liliás," I replied, weakly evading her question.

"Never mind that: I have forgiven him long since. Does he doubt it?"

"He considered himself the aggrieved person, and was deeply offended; he has behaved shamefully," said I.

"Oh!" was all that Liliás answered, but it went to my heart—it seemed to break so like an agony from hers.

For some minutes we sat quite silent: Liliás did not seem to have the power to ask any

further questions then. After a painful pause, she added, "Perhaps he will not write to me again?" This as if she half expected a denial. "I understand," she proceeded with forced calm, "he is very angry: he will cease to care for me at all; he will not love me any more?" All this interrogatively. My lips were sealed: any consolation that I could have offered must have been a lie: I let her draw her own conclusions from my silence. "You would tell me if Stephen named me in his letter."

"Yes, Liliás, I would: but he does not." She looked at me drearily for a few minutes, till the voice of the old man was heard calling to her from below.

"Do not tell him," she whispered to me: "he must know nothing about it. It makes him happy to think if he should die, Stephen would take care of me."

I assented, and we went down into the parlour together. Paul bade her come and shake up his cushions; and as she did so, he gazed wistfully up in her face, stroked the little hands that

moved about him so gently, and asked her if her cough were better. She replied that it was; and then adding something about her flowers, went out into the garden. Her father watched her as she moved slowly to and fro, with her arms hanging listlessly by her sides, and her head bent down.

“What is in her heart, I wonder,” he said, in his maundering way. “What ails her?”

She came in again presently, but with such a lagging step I scarcely knew it; and when I went home she accompanied me to the door, holding me by the hand: hers felt quite hot and feverish. “Kathie,” she said hesitatingly, “*you* will not forsake me for what is come and gone? You will let Jean come to see me? You will come too?”

“Yes, Lilius, oftener than ever; and you must not forget my mother: you know how she loves you,” I replied, drawing her nearer to me.

“If you will have me sometimes, I shall like to come.” She seemed as if she would have added something more, but checking herself, she

kissed my cheek, and said, with a wan smile, that she would go and water her flowers, for they had been forgotten during the last week, and were pining for drought.

XXVIII.

None of my brother's subsequent letters contained any mention of Lilius, or any allusion to his broken engagement. I think she did not, all at once, abandon her hope that Stephen might relent; she, indeed, knew but little of the selfish hardness of his real character. She always spoke kindly of him, and thought so; neither did she shrink from naming him as some would. My mother and she spoke of him together; and she was always pleased to hear the most trivial details of his letters read. On one or two occasions she even asked to take them home with her. Those letters never were returned.

I cannot say that there was any sudden change came over her at this time: she never had been

otherwise than delicate. Paul confided to me with trembling, that the disease of which her mother died was developing itself, and bade me not tell Stephen yet, lest it should kill him! I felt guilty at letting the poor old man go on in his delusion, though it comforted him.

People talk of broken hearts: those who use that form of expression would have said that Liliás's heart was broken; the physicians whom Paul called in, and fee'd magnificently, named it decline. They did not falsify their skill by pretending they could cure her: they talked vaguely of the uncertain progress of the disorder, and the influence of the weather; gave a few harmless medicines and a few cautions, which her father jealously adhered to. He was, as it were, engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with death for the possession of his best and dearest; and he held his own with the convulsive grip of despair.

I was backwards and forwards a great deal that autumn, for the sick girl had not many friends, and seemed to find the pleasantest relief

in our society. My mother and Jean were also often with her. Thus I was brought much into contact with Paul, but I always shrank from seeing him alone; for, as a relief to his burdened mind, he would sometimes reveal to me portions of his past history: deeds of bold wrong and subtle fraud, for which he thought Lilius was to bear the punishment and be the sacrifice.

One gloomy October evening I remember well. Lilius had suffered much during the day, and had been prevailed on to lie down in bed, where she presently sank into a feverish sleep. Paul was in an agony of excitement: he felt that he was going to be worsted in this struggle for his darling, that perhaps a few weeks or even days would see death the victor. His self-upbraidings were miserable to listen to. He talked wildly of two brothers, a summer night, and a river; of one being carried down by the current, and uttering a cry for help, which the other might have given but withheld.

“Cain,” said he, “was not, in God’s sight, more a murderer than was that man. Could there be

forgiveness for such a one? could there be peace?"

Then he raved of gold gained by this brother's death, and of the curse that came with it; of the last despairing cry that haunted him wherever he went; of the success that dogged his footsteps like his shadow, depriving him of the excitement of fear and hope; of how failure had been impossible to him, and how the tide of his wealth could have no ebb until he and it fell together into the gulf of death. Sometimes he blasphemed Heaven awfully, and tried to persuade himself that *here* would be the end; but his leprous conscience would not be so cheated. One moment he moaned piteously, "Lilias, Lilias!" the next raved passionately of swift streams, and secrets that they bear away to the deep sea; then turned full round in his chair, as if to confront a visible accuser, and passionately averred his innocence. Next a season of sickening dread came over him: he talked of drifting on a shoreless sea—drifting eternally; pursued by demons which hid amongst the foam, and tortured him with drowning wails,

and ever watchful eyes. Then his face was awful: rigid and white; drops of sweat stood on his forehead; his limbs writhed as if battling with fierce waves; and a gurgling cry struggled from his lip as if a death-stream were flowing over it.

I thought him mad. I had heard it whispered often: now I was sure of it.

Unable to bear the sight of his torture any longer, I stole away to Liliás's room. She still slept; so I sat down in the shadow of the curtain between the window and the bed. Presently Paul came in, and stood leaning towards the child's unconscious face with his tremulous hands locked one in the other. He began to talk to her about Stephen: at the sound of his name she opened her eyes, smiled faintly, and asked, what of him.

"Would Liliás like him to come to her?" said the old man: "shall we send for him?"

"No, father, he might grieve: I want nobody but you now. Kiss me, father."

I crept away unobserved, and left her cheering

Paul with pleasant words ; bidding him hope both for her and himself. Her thought was all for him now : she knew that her days were already "as a tale that is told," but tried to cheer him to the last. He deserved it from her ; for whatever his own sins, his love for her was deep and enduring.

XXIX.

As the winter advanced, Liliás's strength wore more quickly away. One night just before Christmas I went in, and found her and Paul sitting one on each side of the fire. Liliás showed me that she had decked the room for Yule-tide, and asked if anybody was coming to spend it with us—meaning, I supposed, Stephen or Felix Mayne.

I said no : we should be quite alone.

After that she sat for a long while with her hands clasping her knees, her head bent forward, and her bright, bright eyes fixed on the fire.

Paul never took his covetous gaze from her face. He had watched the signs of decay before, and knew them every one: he saw what was at hand, and had ceased to moan. The shadow was settling down on his hearthstone, never more to be lifted.

“Lilias, Lilias, what dost thou see in the fire? What ails thee?” he once asked tremulously.

“Oh, father! I am very weary. I thought I heard music.”

“It is the Christmas waits,” said I; and listened but heard nothing.

Ann said afterwards, when we talked of it at home, it was her *call*.

They both resumed their watch: he of her face; she of the faces in the fire.

Yet a few days more and Paul tottered alone from room to room of the silent house, carefully darkening every window by which a garish sunbeam could steal in. And Lilias lay dead in her hushed chamber, while the joy-bells of the old Minster close by rang the Old Year out and the New Year in.

XXX.

From some unexplained cause, my sister Isabel's marriage with Reginald Pompe did not take place so early as was fixed, and we were not without hopes that the engagement might be broken off. But in January we received a letter from her in Paris: she had been quietly married at Dover, where she and Aunt Aurelia were staying, and had gone abroad immediately, so that there was not the slightest prospect of her coming to Eversley.

My aunt's marriage with Colonel Longstaff took place shortly after, and they also went to reside on the continent—I think at Tours.

My dear mother, whether from disease, which had been steadily undermining her constitution, or from prolonged anxiety, I cannot say, fell ill during the spring of this year; and when she rose from her sick bed, though still firm in mind and every faculty, her working days were over.

By Jean's thoughtfulness and care I was left at liberty to continue my school as usual, or else I know not into what poverty we might have sunk. My mother's annuity was still lost to us, and would be so for yet many years to come; a heavy doctor's bill was to be provided for, in addition to all our daily recurring wants; and a dark day seemed gathering for us.

In this extremity I thought it not wrong to ask Stephen again to share with us, at least, in the payment of his remaining debts. He replied that it was impossible, for he had married Flora Brunton and set up housekeeping; he was just on the point of applying to us for a loan himself. He must have thought that we were made of money! No hope, therefore, from that quarter.

These cares began to weigh on my spirits like a nightmare: I grew prematurely old; the one grey hair that Isabel had espied soon came to be multiplied by hundreds, and I lost my last faint tint of spring bloom. The change came gradually and unnoticed.

I looked at my father's books, most of them useless to us, but all of considerable money value, and one evening proposed to my mother that they should be sold. She did not like the proposition at all: she objected to such a manner of supplying our needs as a slight upon his memory. Though I could not enter into her feelings there, the subject was not pressed. There was another sore trouble upon me just then, which I was writhing under in silence, and for a time that put off all care for small things. It was that I was having the last fierce struggle with my heart to give up Felix.

XXXI.

“So you are seventeen to day, little Jean!” said my mother, patting the rosy face that bent down to kiss her.

“Seventeen! Oh, what a monstrous age! I am quite a woman grown, and must begin to

‘behave conformable,’ as Ann says. Kathie, stand by me, to show our mother how much taller I am than you.”

I left the tea that I was pouring out for my mother’s breakfast, and we stood back to back. Jean was two inches my superior in height: an advantage in which she felt a sort of harmless pride. She was besides slight, delicately shaped, and very pretty; not radiantly beautiful like Isabel, but of that quiet placid order of loveliness that looks bright and cheerful after the snows of age have frosted brown hair, and faded the rose-flush of youth on the cheek. Such a face hers was as one loves to see in the midst of children, making a serene light around the hearth of home; such a face as many a man’s and woman’s memory shrines in its holiest niche, and links with a first prayer learnt from a mother’s lips.

“Is Isabel taller than I am, Kathie?” Jean asked with an interest that made my mother and me smile involuntarily.

“Yes: she is quite a majestic height.”

“I wish I could see her; we should scarcely know each other: it is three years since she went away; I think she will never come back,” and Jean leant her chin on her hand, and looked as if she were solving a difficult arithmetical problem, while my mother sighed heavily.

On such an occasion as Jean's birthday a whole holiday was given to our scholars, and in the evening many of those who had been children when she was came to have tea with us. They were quite a merry party in all: Effie and Rachel Withers (Polly was lately married to a young clergyman, and gone to Carlisle), Janey Munroe, and others of the same generation.

It was among these gay young people—all women ranging from the ages of seventeen to twenty—that I felt most strongly how far I had overstepped the bounds of youth. They all looked up to me as a person of age and gravity, who had been a grown-up woman and had taught them when they went to school under the charge of a nursemaid. So, after tea was over,

and these happy young creatures, just on the threshold of womanhood, drew together to talk, I felt that I might be a restraint upon them, and therefore withdrew to my mother's room. She had got the large family Bible on the table beside her, and was poring over the entries, written by my father, of our births, and of the deaths of my two little brothers. She shut the book as I entered, and looked up with tear-bright eyes. "So, you have left them down-stairs, Kathie?" said she gently.

"Yes, mother."

"I have been looking at these dates, and reckoning up: poor little Willie would have been nineteen and Robin twenty-one, if they had lived. Bring me a pen, and I will write the days of Stephen's and Isabel's marriages." I did as she bid me, and when she had inserted the necessary date in the blank spaces left for the purpose she glanced up and said, "How the time flies, Kathie! It is ten years since your father died."

"It seems a long while since to me, mother."

“ You don't look well to-night, Kathie : what ails you ? ”

“ Nothing, dear mother, nothing at all. I am quite well. ”

“ You seem sad, as if something had happened ? ”

“ Nothing has happened. May I read you a chapter, mother ? ”

“ If you please, Kathie ; I should like it. ”

So I drew the book over the table and began : for a long while I read on mechanically, scarcely hearing the words I uttered, and forming them into no sense whatever. One of those dead trances of hope was on me when my heart said bitterly, “ All is vanity. ”

My mother asked me to turn to the last chapter but one of the Revelations. I did so, and proceeded steadily to the fourth verse : “ And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away. ”

My voice failed : I shut the book, and dropped my face upon my hands.

“It has been a long while to wait, Kathie—a weary while,” said my mother tenderly; “but most lives have many such failings of the heart before they come where there shall be ‘no more pain.’”

I raised my head and tried to be cheerful, not to grieve her; I spoke of Stephen, and said that there was a prospect of his becoming really steady now that he was settled.

“Yes I hope so, Kathie. Then he may see the propriety of releasing us from the burden of his debts.” (I had not told her of my last application to him and its failure.) “Then you will be free to live for yourself.”

“Don’t let us talk of that, mother: it is all over now,” I answered quietly, playing with the ring that Felix had put upon my finger so long ago.

“All over, Kathie! What do you mean? Have you broken your engagement?”

“Yes, mother. It was right to give it up; I ought to have done so long since. Look at me—I am not what I was; every year makes me less

fitted to be Felix Mayne's wife. I am not the same Kathie he loved seven years ago. It is all over, dear mother! No more waiting, no more Thursday letters."

"And you did not consult me, Kathie. It might yet have been."

"Never, mother: I believe I have done what is right. I belong to you only, now: no other home claims me. I am content."

"Oh, child! you have done this for me."

"And for him, mother. He will find a wife who is his equal now. The world has gone on with him, while with me it has stood still. It is all past and ended: let us put it away like a book whose last chapter we have read. Mine; after all, will not have been a wasted life."

"No, my poor Kathie!"

My mother's eyes were overflowing with tears as she looked at me pitifully; but I was calm, quite calm, since I had told her all. I had written the letter that morning: it was still on its way, and I had not had time to realize my life as it would be with all its future darkened and

its pleasant light blotted out. Perhaps, I was stunned yet by the self-inflicted shock, and could not feel.

XXXII.

“ There are other things in life besides marrying and giving in marriage,” I said to myself that night. “ Felix has work and care : I have work and care. We should have been happy together—yes, ours would have been a complete existence ; but destiny fights against us, and we must live, suffer, and die apart.” Then stoicism broke down, and passion had its utterance. “ Shall I never, *never* see him again? Can it be true that I have thrust his love away from me—that I have myself let in these floods of blackness over my soul? Oh, I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it! Let me die! Let me die now! Oh, I have been wicked and cruel to him! I have been treacherous, and he will

hate me!"—And the paroxysm passed in a storm of tears.

I went about my work with a numb, frozen pressure on all my senses; a sort of death-in-life sensation, as when a heavy pain throbs through every fevered nerve, and drags, and tears, and wrenches it without cessation. I had conjured him not to write to me again: there was nothing to look forward to, no relief to hope for, no severer agony to dread. A Thursday morning came and went; another; yet another—and no letter.

"I have but to look my life in the face and grow resigned." I said. And I tried to be still at heart again—in vain.

Nearly a month had passed: the keen agony had worn itself down into a stony apathy broken sometimes with a shrieking pain. This love had been the one strong sensation of my being—its vitality, in short; rent away from it I became almost as a body without a soul. All elasticity, fortitude, endurance left me. I worked, spoke, acted like a machine. I dreaded sometimes lest I should go mad. Once I thought I would write to

Felix, but from that folly I was kept. Then I wished he would send me a letter—even if it were full of the hard reproaches that I deserved.

One quiet April evening when the sun was setting, I went up into Stephen's hutch, and stood awhile at the window watching the sky. It was brightly, gorgeously beautiful, but to me inexpressibly dreary. There seemed to be no pity in heaven; its glow and glory mocked me.

“It would shine so if he were dead,” I thought.

There was the blackness of mourning nowhere but in my heart. Even little Jean came carolling down the stairs as I stood idly conversing with my sorrow. I must get away from myself somehow. I dressed in haste and left the house: I did not want rest but distraction. Down Friargate and onward, over the Barbican Bridge, I hastened, as if urgent business called me; these low streets had poured forth their crowds, and I threaded through them as if some end were to be attained by speed. The daylight was giving place to a reeking, misty gloom; the old streets looked older in it, the shabby houses shabbier, and the forlorn

groups, clustered at the outlet of each passage-way, more miserable and destitute. The dark and ancient gate once passed, the twilight country stretched out beyond; but this I sought not: rather the stir and bustle of the multitude than my own heart now; its thoughts were not safe company. Turning to the right I re-entered the town by the Castle Mills Bridge, and under the gloom of the prison walls crept in amongst the crowd again. It must have been either the assize week, or some great fair or market, for there were hundreds of people moving to and fro the streets, which was not the case in Eversley at ordinary times. In the High-street, the lamps were lighted as I passed down it, but when I came to the Minster neighbourhood all was dark.

Not eased of my aching burden, not refreshed in any manner, I entered the house again, and crawled wearily up-stairs to the west parlour. At first I thought it was empty, and the fire out; but another glance showed me that it was only hidden by a figure bending between it and me. This figure rose up as I drew near, and Felix

Mayne faced me. I stretched out my two hands helplessly, deprecatingly; I should have fallen if he had not caught me.

“Kathie, I have been ill, miserably ill,” he began: “I wanted to send for you when that wretched letter came and stopped me. Now I am here, I want to know from your own lips what you mean.”

“Oh, Felix, spare me!”

“No, Kathie, I will spare you nothing. You have played with me seven years, and I have the right to ask you why you drop the game so suddenly. If you hold to what that letter conveys, then, Kathie, you never *did* love me, and never *can* love me, as I have done you.”

I said nothing: I sat crushed, broken under the weight of his resentment. I saw his face: it was dark, worn, hollow; the hair on his temples was grey and thin; the lines of his features sharpened; his eyes vivid, restless, and passionate. I shrank from them as a criminal might shrink before his judge.

“Kathie, you say nothing? Why have you

led me on all this time, to throw me off at last? Could any man have loved you more faithfully than I have done? You know it is treacherous and cruel, this deed of yours."

"Yes, Felix."

"Kathie, while you sit there with that white, stony, passive, listless face, do you not know that I am almost mad! Have you said your last words to me, when you acquiesce in my saying you have acted treacherously by me."

"Felix, I have nothing to plead but this—my mother is ill, and we have no money; I must work for her and for Jean. I dare not let my mother's life be the limit of my probation and yours. I asked you for my freedom, because between us there is but this, and my happiness must not depend on the release from a duty such as mine."

"You mean that you never could marry me until your mother's death?"

"Yes."

"I have enough for all, and more than enough; what I have worked for was *you*, Kathie: I am richer and poorer than ever I was. Richer,

because money is plenty with me ; poorer, because you shamefully take away all the value and reward of what I have done. How *dare* you do it?"

"Felix, if I had done this three years since, it had been right ; but I was selfish and could not : the necessity remained, and at last forced itself on me."

"Kathie, I say again, I have enough for all!"

"My mother would never bear dependence even on her children."

"That is a contradiction ! you are giving your heart's blood to her now."

"Felix, leave me, do leave me!"

"Is that your last word, Kathie : is all my patience to go for nothing?"

"Felix, go away and hate me : I have done you grievous wrong, and am not worthy that you should love me," I supplicated.

"No, Kathie ; you are just as weak and obstinate as other women. You are not the creature you once were : for years you have gone on hardening into a set form of self-negation and

duty until you are a mere statue, and no longer flesh and blood. You are bartering away my life and your own for a chimera. Do you not see it?"

I kept silence; I felt, indeed, like an unworthy outcast—too low even for contempt. The idea of doing right upheld me no more: I was undergoing the punishment of a duty once neglected, and now to be done doubly, and with twice the first difficulty.

He waited a little while, and his features took a hard, iron set, as if they never would relax again. "Kathie, will your lips never open for me more?" he asked, in a deep, chilling, reserved tone. "Am I to go and never inflict my presence upon you again?"

I uttered no word, made no movement to arrest his departure. He walked to the door, paused, and came back: "Kathie, it is a grand mistake; you love me all the time. Why will you make yourself ice to me?"

I looked up in his face; it seemed to waver and change, and then to fade from my vision

altogether. For a moment it seemed as if death were coming to end it all; but with a desperate effort I clutched back expiring consciousness and said, "Felix, you are killing me! Spare me your reproaches!"

"Well, Kathie, I am going." He held out his hand, and I laid mine within it; it was cold as a stone, and it dropped to my side like one when it fell from his grasp. My face was hidden, and the closing of the door told me he was gone.

Jean was descending the stairs as I went up. She stopped and said, "Kathie, you look as if you had seen a ghost!"

"So I have, Jean; I have been face to face with my dead youth and happiness."

And thus they learnt that Felix Mayne had been with me.

XXXIII.

This was a break in the black tedium of my suffering: for a time I was stunned; but presently I woke up to the consciousness of the new life before me—the long, long blank of quiet endurance, with no light beyond except the far off glimmer of another world. As yet, the peace that may arise out of regular duties done was none of mine. I hid my trouble in my own heart, but that it ravaged, that it desolated miserably.

Of Felix I dared not think. I could remember only his grey, iron face, as I saw it last: the worn, restless expression; the cold rebuke of his eye.

It is useless to say more of this. The summer passed, the autumn fruitage was gathered, and another Yule-tide approached.

Perhaps—perhaps I was not quite prepared for what came at this season; it came without any previous warning: I had *said* that I wished it; but

in my heart of hearts I thought it would never be. Felix Mayne was married.

The news reached me in a stiff, old-fashioned letter from Hannah; it was a brief and contradictory, but kindly meant composition. Her master was married, she wrote, to the sweetest of young ladies—a bishop's daughter, and very beautiful. Her name was Emmeline. A few regrets for me were mixed up with enthusiastic praises of her new mistress. "I hoped it would have been you, Miss Kathie, because you seemed to suit my master every way. When you was over at Kingston, at the time of the fever, I made up my mind nothing could part you, if it were not death; which shows we have no right to count for certain on anything in this world," the old servant said. Then she added, that her mistress was almost a child, but very docile and gentle, and fond of being amongst her flowers and birds in the conservatory; and that her master's new living was in a beautiful place, the like of which she had never lived in before. She ended by saying that she took the

liberty to write because she was sure that any way and every way I should be glad to hear of her master's happiness.

I tried to persuade myself that I was glad: it was the best thing that could have happened; certainly it was. Still there was a grain, a very little grain of bitterness in my feelings. He had not taken long to replace me; I was soon forgotten! It was with a very listless step and tired mind that I went about my work that day; but the children were more tedious or perverse than usual, and I was forced to exert myself.

By night, when all was over, and I sat alone in the parlour, other thoughts came to me. I stirred the fire, and made a glorious blaze; the glow penetrated to my spirit. I took out Hannah's letter, and read it again. The whole aspect of things was changed. It was right that Felix should marry: he had already wasted the best years of his life in waiting for me; he was growing despondent; for he was one whose nature imperiously demanded love, and interest, and hope. With this fair, young Emmeline he

would be happy again—his life's spring would be renewed.

“ Yes, it is right; it is for the best, and I will be glad,” I said aloud. There was still my home for me, with its cares, duties, and love: no need longer to grieve over two wasted lives: his was restored, and embellished, and cheered; and even round mine interests would yet gather, though not personal and selfish interests.

Such were the consolations I tried to lay to my heart, sitting alone by the winter fire. Then I conjured back certain scenes of long ago: the school-room at Crofton in the twilight; the garden one afternoon with blue sky overhead, sunlight dancing on the grass through waving branches, and words never to be forgotten which had brightened my young heart to perfect happiness.

From this day I began to live somewhat in the past; the future had lost its allurements. Old scenes, faces of old friends formed themselves clear reflections in the winter fire; certain tones in the wind, certain aspects of the sky, swept musically over my memory. Disappointment did not em-

bitter me, and I had a gentler feeling for all those to whom it had been cruel and hardening; I could be thankful that home was still left me to make the breaking away of more passionate love less desolating.

It was strange what a deep quiet came to me by and by after the news of Felix's marriage. "My life for myself is ended—I may live henceforward for others. I give up being young or having any hopes on my own account," was my prevalent thought; and till then I never knew what a vast amount of consideration, hope, faith, and charity, had been centred on myself, and myself only. Even a degree of cheerfulness returned to me, and I no longer moved about the house like a discontented ghost. A new day of a pale, shady October tint had dawned over my life, and it was worth having since the summer was ended.

XXXIV.

The doctor's bill contracted during my mother's illness was not sent in, and trusting that what we had economized might meet it, I asked that it should be given to me. The doctor was an awfully stern-looking person, whom the undertakers would perhaps have found it well to testimonialize, if his professional skill had not counteracted the gloomy effects of his countenance on his patients. No notice was taken of my request; so one day, encountering Dr. Riley in the Close, I named it again. He did not know anything about a bill—all the bills had gone out punctually on New Year's Day.

“But we have not received ours, Dr. Riley,” I persisted.

“Then your name is not in the books, and there is no bill for you. My respects to your excellent mother—no thanks—good day to you,” and with a jerking bow Dr. Riley passed on.

I had heard of his benevolence before with some incredulity; but ever since, when anybody of a particularly sour, grim look comes across me, I always give him credit for a charitable disposition and the best intentions, for Dr. Riley's sake.

In my short walks with Jean, when our mother was well enough to be left for half an hour, I generally chose the quiet Westgate suburb of our old town, where the Hospital for Maiden Ladies was situated. It was familiarly styled "The Old Maids." I used to look up at it with prophetic eye, thinking that when I was aged and alone in the world, I might find a peaceful retreat there, for I had friends amongst the clergy, in whose gift the charity lay. One evening we met Miss Bootle and Miss Linnet—the last-named old lady had just been elected to rooms in the Hospital from amongst fifteen candidates: she had been long a governess. Jean asked if she were comfortable in her new abode.

"I should be perfectly comfortable, my dear, but for the disappointment of the fourteen who did not get in," replied she; "but I had been twelve

years on the list—the longest of any; and, besides, I am the eldest—seventy-six, Miss Brande.”

“Kathie is interested in the place. Will you tell us what it is like inside, and how you live?” said my sister.

“You had better come some afternoon and take tea with me, Kathie, and then we will show you all over the Home—‘Ladies’ Home’—not Hospital,” interposed Miss Bootle with a little prancing air of dignity.

“It is exquisitely clean, and we have each two rooms, and twenty pounds a year,” said Miss Linnet. “It used to be either twenty-five or thirty pounds, but it has fallen off. Perhaps property is worth less than it was a hundred years ago, when the Home was founded.”

“Nothing of the sort!” snapped Miss Bootle; “somebody has swallowed it up, as somebody always does swallow up charitable bequests.”

“There is a portress or housekeeper, but most of us wait upon ourselves,” Miss Linnet continued, without heeding the interruption. “I make my fire and my bed the same as others do, which we

have not been accustomed to. But it is nice to have a certain shelter over our heads until we are carried to church in our coffins. Some poor governesses go through *horrors* when they are past work—starvation—yes, my dears.”

“The Minster clock will strike nine directly: we shall be locked out, Linney, if we don’t go,” said Miss Bootle nervously.

“Do they ever turn old ladies out of the Home?” asked Jean, laughing.

“Not unless they marry or *otherwise* disgrace themselves, the rules say. I advise you to keep out, Jean, for you would make mischief amongst us. Now, good-night, my dears; there is the clock,” said Miss Bootle; and the two ancient ladies disappeared through the door in the wall which secluded their dwelling and garden from the irreverent and satirical public eye.

Was I, after all, to spend my last days in that grim old house? It was scarcely worth while speculating yet, though I had turned the ominous “corner,” the quarter of a century; for there was still another five-and-twenty years for me to

battle in the wide world before my anchor could be cast there. But already my face would have been a favourable introduction, for it was rapidly assimilating itself to some of those grey, solemn visages that we saw, now and then, under the Old Maids' porch, or looking out of the Old Maids' windows.

XXXV.

Just after Christmas—indeed I believe it was on New Year's Day—my brother Stephen wrote us word that his wife had brought him twins—a boy and a girl. He wished me to travel up to London during the holidays to see them; for Flora was only delicate, and his domestic arrangements did not go on so comfortably as was desirable. My mother's growing weakness, however, compelled me to decline the invitation; and as Flora had her own mother and sisters within reach, I did so without any difficulty. Jean, also, had long promised a visit to her

married schoolfellow at Carlisle, and I would not have disappointed her on any account: and to Ann it would not have been safe to confide anybody who required care, for her wits were generally wool-gathering.

She had, in her time, captivated several lovers; but the favoured one was Joe: that identical tinman through whose culpable negligence the household saucepans had once been imperilled. Joe must have been of very tender age at the commencement of the courtship, for he was seven years younger than Ann: they had been *off and on*, as she called it, for a long time, but now the affair seemed to be approaching a crisis.

My mother offered a gentle remonstrance on the subject of their disparity of age, to which Ann replied that Joe would be older before *she* married him—quite losing sight of the fact that she would progress at the same rate, and still keep seven years ahead.

For some months past she had been knitting stockings with a view to Joe's feet—members

disproportionately large for the body they supported.

The courtship was carried on chiefly at the stairs' foot, and appeared to consist of brief sentences from Joe, titters from Ann, and prolonged silences. I have known them stand for the space of two hours there, acting as a padlock on the parlour-door; for I had a delicacy about interrupting these permitted *tête-à-têtes*.

Ann's eccentricities were redoubled at this period, and if ever I had occasion to name any shortcoming in her work, she always unblushingly excused herself by saying, "Oh, Miss Kathie! I were thinking about Joe;" and, of course, under such circumstances, I knew better than to find fault.

This was Jean's first absence from home, and we missed her very much indeed. The blithe, pleasant ways she had were like sunshine in the house; and from the hour she went away to the hour she came back, my mother and I never ceased wishing for her. On the evening of her return, after our mother was asleep, we stayed up

in the west parlour to talk over her visit, and Polly Withers's baby, and other things.

"Now, Kathie, I have something very particular to tell you," whispered Jean with a blush, when the general news was disposed off. "I am afraid I am very selfish, sister: I am indeed."

"It must be something quite new if you are: let me hear about it."

"Well—it is about Francis Maynard."

I started and gazed in my sister's face, now suffused with a vivid blush. "Go on, my darling."

"He has not forgotten us, as it seemed: he has been travelling to Jerusalem, and I cannot tell where besides; all over, I think. And, Kathie, he is coming over to Eversley very soon."

"Is that all, Jean?"

"No, Kathie: he has asked me to be his wife."

"He is the selfish person in this case, I think."

“And I half promised I would, Kathie.”

“You were right, Jean: and the news makes me happier than you can believe.” Nevertheless my voice trembled, and tears dimmed my eyes.

“Yet it seems selfish to leave you to work alone. What will our mother say? Will she not feel it unkind?”

“No, Jean, no! It will comfort her to know that you are safe under the care of such a good man as Francis Maynard; it comforts me too. It is exactly what we should have asked for you if we had both had on our wishing-caps. It is quite suitable and right.”

“You used to think him rather proud and stiff, Kathie, but he is not so at all; he is very kind and merry now, and *so* clever.”

“Of course he is. Well, mother must be told these good tidings. Ah, Jeanie! bairns are a charge, you see.”

“Francis has been presented to a living in Cumberland; and he says we must be married soon. He does not like long engagements.”

“He is very wise,” responded I.

“He is coming to stay with his uncle Withers next week,” added Jean with a little hesitation, “and he wishes all to be settled while he is here. Oh, Kathie! you must not think it is I am in such haste: indeed it is all Francis!”

“You have nothing to wait for; and the sooner you marry, now that you have agreed to pass your lives together, the better.”

“You did not think so for yourself, Kathie.”

“There seemed to be difficulties and impediments in my case which do not exist in yours, Jean: I would not have you go through such a tedium of waiting, and hoping, and wearying as I did, for the world! To think! Here we sit over the fireside coolly talking of marrying *you*. It seems only the other day that you were quite a baby thing, pottering over your sampler and learning Watts’s Hymns!”

Jean smiled pleasantly. That was a long time ago to her, and in the years between then and now were many way-marks of feeling, that showed how her girlhood and womanhood were come upon her. Child as I still had thought

her, heart and mind were ripening fast to summer. It was well for Jean that a fair destiny was to be hers: she was not one to cope with difficulties, or to support much arduous work. A calm sky and a still atmosphere suited her well; in a fierce storm, or a dreary chilling winter of sorrow, she would have sunk exhausted. How is it that for some the stream of life flows so smoothly, while for others it is ever amongst the breakers?

When my mother was told the news she received it with undisguised gladness, as I had expected; but it recalled to her my fate, and she would have revivèd it, but I bade her hush! Once *Requiescat* pronounced over a sorrow, it should have no resurrection. If its pale ghost revisit us in the watches of the night we must entertain the unbidden guest, but let it not intrude at noon or come as a spectre to a wedding feast.

It was between two and three years since I had seen Francis Maynard, and in the interim he had run through a very creditable college

career. He possessed talent, and had gained some distinction as a classical scholar; altogether he was a man for whom you might predict a straightforward and honourable, if not a brilliant, course. His appearance was prepossessing, his manner lively and courteous; but it was for his sterling moral worth, and even temper, that my mother chiefly valued him: they were the two things she ranked of first importance in married happiness.

There were a few among Francis Maynard's relatives who did not cordially approve the match; they thought that with his prospects he might have aspired higher. He wished this ill-feeling to be overcome; and that these cavillers might know and learn to approve his choice, he interested for Jean his maiden aunt, Mrs. Alberta Withers, who lived in the Minster Close, not far from the Deanery. This lady conceived a strong partiality for Jean, and took great delight in introducing her amongst her future connections.

Oh! how pretty the child looked when she

was dressed to go to one of the solemn tea-parties in the Close. I always decked her myself, with our mother looking on; and she used to wear soft white muslin, with knots of blue or cherry-coloured ribbon, and her abundant brown hair in glossy ringlets on her neck. She was not queenly like Isabel, but so fresh, dainty, and graceful, you just longed to take her in your arms and kiss her. No wonder that with such a fair, loving creature in his heart, Francis Maynard was deaf to all whispers of self-interest. Before he returned to Cumberland it was settled amongst us that they should be married in May: the interval was quite long enough for preparation.

XXXVI.

One night, in the early part of March, when Jean and I were sitting with my mother up in her room, we heard Ann scudding about below with extra noise and bustle. In a few minutes she

burst into the room, stocking in hand, the ball of worsted absent without leave, and the needles running out of the stitches; she was also without cap, and in manifest disorder, both mental and bodily.

“ Oh, Miss Kathie! oh, ma’am, this pumpitation!” she gasped hurriedly, pressing one hand against her side; “ oh, Miss Kathie! Joe says it is the jackdaws, or else the men who have been mending the clock! oh, my heart!”

We none of us attempted to precipitate the news Ann was panting to tell, knowing by experience that hurry always retarded her the more; but Jean smiled.

“ It isn’t a laughing matter, jackdaws or no,” said Ann, with an offended air.

“ Certainly not, it is very painful,” replied my mother, soothingly, thinking that the “ pumpitation” was referred to.

“ Yes, ma’am, I’m sure it is,” responded Ann, ameliorated; “ it is an awful sight, for when Joe told me, I just ran as far as Kill-Canon-Corner to get a look. There’s crowds upon crowds of

people, engines, soldiers, and the old Dean in the thick of it all."

"*Please, Ann, do tell us what is going on,*" supplicated Jean, comically.

"The Minster's a fire!"

I ran into my closet and looked out: the air was full of a lurid smoke; the bell-tower showed like a furnace; the Close was quite light with the flames.

"I must go, Jean—I must go to see it," whispered I, as she came with her quick breathing behind me.

If it had been a living thing that I had known and loved, the sight could not have moved me more. It was impossible to sit there still, while this friend of all times, this dumb eloquent friend was being destroyed. I dragged on my cloak, shrouded my head in the hood, and ran out. A great multitude of people were there surging to and fro like waves of the sea, shouting in hoarse, excited voices, and adding their tumult to the fierce roaring of the fire. The whole length of the nave was flame; flame vomited forth in forked

jets from the windows ; the puny streams of water seemed as drops to all that seething mass of fire. From time to time the crash of falling timber lulled the flames for an instant, but only to stir them up to fiercer strength. The machinery and flooring being gone, at length fell the glorious old bells, giving out their last broken peal as they rang down through the red blaze. A shout broke from the multitude at the hearing of that knell ; awed, superstitious faces gazed up helplessly at the ruin, and dark whispers circulated amongst the crowd. I had stayed on the outskirts of the throng, and presently I observed Paul Fenton standing near me, bareheaded and with his poor, white hairs fluttering in the keen March wind. I asked him how he did.

“Bravely, bravely,” he replied, rubbing his hands, as if he were warming them at the fire. “Look at those demons writhing in the blaze ! they have watched and mocked me for seventy years, and it is my turn now. I am enjoying it hugely. I have come to see them tormented. Watch them. It is grand ! Dear, dear, that I should

have lived to see it! I'm an old man, a miserable, poor, old man—very poor."

His voice sank into a pitiful whine as the insane excitement faded out of his eyes; I should have moved away, but his skeleton fingers grasped my arm fast.

"Stay and see it out; if it could go on burning till Doomsday, I'd watch," said the old man fiercely: "he used to like the Minster; he could tell fine tales about the bells, could Stephen. But he is gone, and Liliias is gone. Everybody is dead and gone. I'm alone; a miserable old man."

He went maundering on to himself about paving the Minster with gold pieces.

"I could do it, I could do it, mind you," he cried, shaking my arm angrily, as if I had contradicted him. "If I had an enemy—but nobody hates poor old Paul—if I had an enemy, I would build him his house with my money, and if it did not drag him down to hell, the curse is off it. Oh, everybody has forgotten but me, and I know everything."

I did not strive with him any longer, but let

him guide me where he would, feeling that I might be rather a protection to him; for of late he went very shabbily clad, and the street boys called after him derisively. He enjoyed the sight intensely; and when, towards midnight, the wind changed, and the flames sank, he began to cry with disappointment. During the height of the excitement, the bitterness of the night had not been felt, but now I shivered in every limb, and begged Paul to let me see him safe home. But this he sturdily refused, and I left him wandering about the Close in the cold and darkness. He was going to keep a vigil, he said.

It was a strange sight to watch the grey, pale dawn creeping over the skeleton tower the morning after the fire. Its empty windows yawning like cavernous mouths, and then the yellow sunshine stealing through the space, and the blue sky visible where yesterday had hung the fine old bells. How we should miss them! How silent for many a day would be the grand Minster aisles!

Jean and I went out together to look at the ruins before my mother awoke, but we found that

the doors were strictly guarded, and that nobody was permitted to enter. On the grass in the Close lay many huge blackened beams which had been brought from the interior of the building; and already groups of people, who had come thither on the same errand as ourselves, were enunciating their opinions and suspicions as to the origin of the disaster. The Dean was giving directions to the workmen; and Mr. Withers, in a state of intense excitement, was jerking to and fro and exchanging a word with everybody.

“ Paul Fenton has been here all night,” said he to me; “ he is madder than ever: some one should look after him.”

The old man was poking about amongst the charred timber, as if searching for the ashes of the demons that he fancied he saw in the fire. I went and spoke to him, but he vouchsafed me no answer. At length a workman rudely ordered him off, and he tottered out at the gate, wagging his poor old head and waving his arm triumphantly. I followed to have a word with him, and said I feared he would have caught cold.

“ Oh no, Miss Kathie! I never felt better in my life—never better. You must come and see me: I have something for you,” he replied distinctly. This invitation astonished me, for since Lilius’s death none of us had been admitted within his doors; but I promised to go.

“ Do not forget. You loved Lilius, and I want to talk about her to you.”

Could he have discovered Stephen’s falsehood to her, I thought.

That afternoon he sent a message for me to go immediately to his house; and leaving the children under Jean’s care, I went. I found him looking alert and brisk, with many of his daughter’s little personal possessions about him; amongst the rest the antique casket of trinkets which she had once shown to me. He had collected them together for the purpose of giving them to me.

“ She wished you to have them, but I could not make up my mind to part with them before,” said he, moving his wrinkled hand tremulously from one thing to the other. “ You see they were all she left me to remind me of her; but take

them away now: I can't bear to think anybody else may handle them."

I remonstrated, and said he should keep them.

"No, they are yours," was the reply. "I could give you my money, but I won't, for you loved her; but I *could* give you more money than would build up the Minster again. Yes, it is not money that maketh rich, for I am a very poor, miserable old man." His wits were astray again, and his blank eyes wandered up and down the wall.

The woman who kept his house came in. "Master has doubted about those things of poor Miss Liliass's often, I hope he's going to let you have them now, Miss Brande," said she, addressing herself to me. "He will be quieter in his mind when they are out of his sight, for he has them always about, and talks as if they could answer him. He gets weaker and less himself every day, I think."

Paul paid no further attention to either of us, so I went away, not, however, attending to what he had mentioned about Liliass's trinkets; for they

were things of value, and very probably on the morrow his generous act would give him a fit of remorse—at least, so I thought. But the same evening the housekeeper brought a box containing the most costly things, and said her master had bid her tell me that they were mine, and could do me no harm. So the whole, unopened, was locked up in the hutch, and there left in the anticipation that before the week was out Paul would send for it again.

Two days later the old man was found dead in his bed. He had no relatives or friends, and the only person really acquainted with his affairs was an attorney, his contemporary in age, who had ceased to practise many years. This person produced Paul's will. It astonished all Eversley by the magnificence of its bequests; for the rumours as to his enormous wealth were more than verified by them. Every charitable foundation in the city profited extensively, as also did others in distant parts of the kingdom. This will had been executed long before the death of Lilius, but nothing was left to her except the curious and valuable con-

tents of the house in which they lived. These, by a recent codicil, were bequeathed to Kathie and Jean Brande, to be equally shared between them. Paul was buried in the Minster at the cost of the city, and a fine marble monument was erected over him, which records—not his virtues—but his rich bequests, so that future generations may gaze and be edified as by the labours of a saint. His money did good at last.

XXXVII.

After the night of the fire, both Jean and I observed in our mother a tremulous nervousness which had never appeared in her before; for even in the midst of pain and affliction she had always hitherto been mentally clear and collected. I proposed one evening to send for our kind Dr. Riley; but to this she objected, saying that she should be well on the morrow; and she tried early to compose herself to rest.

I could not be still that night: my head did

not once press its pillow. An unaccountable sense of depression hung about me—a presentiment of coming sorrow. For a long, long time I sat looking out at the Minster, whose skeleton tower showed more ghastly in the moonlight than in the midday glare. There was a mournful wail in the March wind that swayed the tall poplars in the Close, and made them reel before its steady sweep. Black clouds scudded wildly over the moon at intervals, and made of all a dreary, eerie darkness.

My life passed in review before me through that restless night: its grey, unnatural childhood, its glorious spring of youth and love, and now its deep, still, eventless calm—soon to be broken by inroads of fresh grief. I remembered all my mother's love and forbearance, patience and courage; all that she had done and endured for us since we were children. My thoughts were very sad; and though I wept abundantly, my heart was not eased. Just when the dawn began to break I crept softly into my mother's room, and sat down by the bedside with my

Bible on my lap, waiting till the coming light should enable me to read it.

Presently the curtain was put aside; my mother saw me, and smiled. “I thought you were there, Kathie,” she said, in a voice almost inaudible. “Speak low, darling, not to wake little Jean.”

Oh! how thickly my heart beat as I stood holding her gentle hand in my trembling fingers!

“Kathie, write to Stephen—I should dearly like to see him; and write to Isabel too; but I fear *she* is too far away.”

“Oh, my mother!”

“Hush, Kathie! You have been a good daughter to me, and God will reward you. I am not leaving you alone, darling; ‘my right hand’ must remember that. I ought not to have let you sacrifice yourself for Stephen, and then again for me. Oh, Kathie! it has always been for you to give up to others.”

I put my arms round her neck; speak I could not: the swelling in my throat almost choked me. Yet then I might not give way to my grief: it would have been too cruel to her. She

let me lay her down again on her pillows, but still kept my hand. The tears would come. "There may yet be time to see them both," she murmured wearily; thinking of her absent children. I assented, and kissed her to hide my tears. Oh, my darling mother! were you to leave me? Then I should indeed be alone! It was hard to take her so soon after that other parting, which had torn my heart in twain. There was need to bear in mind whose will it was that I should be thus bereft, to keep me from murmuring and resentment.

I wrote the letters to my brother and Isabel that morning, sitting in my mother's room, while Jean taught the children in the west parlour. After that day they came no more for a time. Dr. Riley gave us no encouragement to hope; and we awaited this sad separation with what strength we could.

Nothing but her passionate love for our mother enabled Jean to restrain her sorrow when she saw what was coming: she wept herself weary; and at evening I made her lie down on my bed.

Half-an-hour after I went in to look at her: she slept with a smile on her lips, though her eyelashes were still wet with tears. Oh, happy heart of youth! to which all sorrow is but April storm!

My mother's glance followed me as I came and went from the other room, and she held out her hand feebly to grasp mine. Her strength was now failing fast; her clear, brown eyes had grown dull, and there was a blind look about them that I had never seen before. She asked if Jean slept. I nodded—not daring to trust myself to speak. I longed to burst forth into crying. Ann was in the room, setting things in order; her presence helped me to control myself; and by the time she had finished and was gone, the mist had cleared from my vision, and the rising in my throat was gulped down. My mother looked at me and sighed.

“Why do you sigh, mother?” I asked.

“Oh, Kathie! I was thinking of what should have been!” I understood her to refer to Mr. Mayne. “I was thinking of the bright little

girl who came home to me from Crofton, eight years ago, and poured out her whole heart full of happiness before her mother."

"Well, mother, she is here still."

"But how changed! Oh, my child! my Kathie! if I had trusted our to-morrow in God's hand, your life might have been happier than it is."

"You mean about poor Stephen? It was right to do what we did. I have been happier than I could have been with such a duty neglected."

"*Happy*, Kathie! No, you have not been happy: you have only been *still*."

"That is all past, mother; let us forget it."

Her fingers tightened convulsively round mine as she spoke; her eyes glittered in the uncertain light; as for mine, the tears fell like rain in pity for those old sufferings. When my mother next spoke, it was of Jean. "You will be with her until you give her to Francis Maynard. She will sorrow; but comfort soon comes to happy natures like hers. I have no fear for little Jean;

but my heart aches often for Isabel. Oh, if I knew how all is with her !”

In the grey, early morning I began to read to her from the Bible, “ God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” There was quiet and soothing in these words, which never show their deep significance till the time of need comes ; and then they seem to have been written expressly for each repining and stricken heart, upon whose soreness they are shed like balm of Heaven.

Two days elapsed before Stephen's arrival, though he had obeyed the summons immediately. The shock to him was violent, being totally unlooked for. It was pitiful to see the late and useless tears he shed in repentance for former unkindness, and to hear the protestations of steadiness and amendment that he offered as atonement. And some consolation they were ; for our mother loved him fondly.

Anxiously did we now look for Isabel's coming, or for some communication from her, but none arrived ; and on the fourth day after Stephen's

appearance, it being the Sabbath, my mother died. She died calmly, without pain, in perfect peace—the natural end of a life like hers.

Oh, my mother! never fell sorrow on me so heavily as it fell that day! Never had the old house under the shadow of the Minster looked so gloomy or so desolate! And when her place was empty, when we went and came without a call from that familiar voice, how long, how weary seemed the bright spring days—how profitless my daily drudgery! Henceforth there was but myself to work for; and I began to learn how those feel who are alone in the world.

XXXVIII.

Jean's marriage was necessarily deferred, but it took place during the following August. I put off my mourning for the day, and went to church with my darling. Happy and sweet she looked. It was a shame in me crying as I did, but I could not forbear. It was selfish, perhaps; but I

remembered that I was giving up my last home-friend, and it almost broke my heart to see her go. Many of the old, desolate, childish thoughts came surging up in my memory; the times when I was weak and ailing, and fancied myself less beloved than the others, and wished bitterly that I were dead. And at night, when Jean and Francis were gone, and I was alone in the west parlour, the poplars rustling without like a heavy shower of rain, the wind whistling, and my solitary shadow wavering ghost-like on the wall, I laid down my face on my arms and wept long and passionately. It was wrong and weak and foolish, I know, but then I was *alone*; and far up through the vista of life—far up as I could see—I must still be alone; the reality was yet new to me, and very, very sad.

It was well for me that there were more changes to come; that I was obliged to bestir myself in the things of every-day life.

Soon after my mother's death, I had received notice that the house must be given up in autumn, as Percie Court, and the other old

buildings so near the Minster, were to be pulled down for the improvement of the neighbourhood.

Jean's marriage over, and "all the world before me where to choose," I gave up my school, and disposed of the furniture. Stephen's remaining debts had been paid off entirely by my share of Paul Fenton's bequest; and my brother offered me a home in his house, thinking that it might be advantageous for all parties, as I could attend to the children, and assist his ailing wife.

Under these circumstances it was necessary that Ann and I should part. One evening she opened the subject herself when she brought in my tea.

I had drawn up to the fire—I always had a fire now for companionship—she made a pause, elevated her nose into the air as if she scented something a long way, and stood waiting until I shut up my book, which was immediately done when I saw she had a communication to make. She looked very resolute, but the kindly sharpness of her eyes was obscured by a tear.

“Miss Kathie, I've been thinking that Thursday come a week, you will have no need of me,” she began interrogatively.

“No, Ann. I am going out into the world, rather late in life, to seek my fortune,” said I with an effort at cheerfulness.

She had been a faithful, attached servant, and I was grieved to part with her; but I knew what had been intended all along.

Hastily wiping her eyes, she drew up her little square figure to its utmost height, and advanced into the broad firelight to make a declaration, of which she seemed very proud indeed.

“I thought, Miss Kathie, your housekeeping being give up, I should have to leave; and sorry I am, for a better mistress doesn't breathe: but being so, and not to be helped, Joe and me has made up our minds to be married. There's nothing to prevent it. Joe is younger than me, but that makes no odds. If he doesn't mind it, I needn't.”

“Certainly not, Ann: I hope you will be happy: I am sure you deserve it.”

“That’s what Joe says, Miss Kathie; and I make no doubt that I shall, for he is a very staid, likely young man. I may have troubles—all of us has—but it’s easy working for one’s own. Then one isn’t alone in one’s old age. Families brings cares, but there’s many a care comes saddled with a blessing, say I.”

“And when do you intend being married, Ann?”

“Well, Miss Kathie, the day you go away. You know I’ve no parents; and as Joe has a little house all ready to take me to, and not to leave you till the last, it would just suit.”

I thanked her for her consideration, which she begged me not to name, as a day earlier or later made no difference in the world.

This settled, there only remained for me to take my leave of those graves in St. Mark’s church-yard—already my mother’s was green—to bid good-bye to my friends and pupils in the Minster Close, and to Miss Bootle at the Old Maids’ Hospital. The latter I found in such ecstatic mood over Charlie, that I am not certain whether

she understood the purport of my visit: she could talk about nothing except that her cat had caught fifteen mice in ten days, and that he was in such high favour in the spinster community, as to be continually invited out to milk and muffin, with the chance of game in closets.

“I hope you will succeed, Kathie, whatever you are intending to try,” said she, kissing me at the door; “but wherever you go I’m sure you will never meet a cleverer cat than my Charlie.”

Of course her Charlie was more important to her than all my affairs—our own little matters are to us dearer than anything relating to other people—but I wished she had given me a kinder farewell: it is chilling to find an old friend bent on discoursing of a cat when you go to bid a long, perhaps a last, good-bye. And so the old life ended.

XXXIX.

Little Ann was gone; all the furniture was gone; the empty rooms echoed ghostly. There was nothing more to do but for me to go too, and yet I lingered. This had been home for six-and-twenty years. I had been born in this old house. Here my sickly childhood wore painfully away; here, in the painted window, had I sat dreaming or eagerly conning a romance; up in my closet-chamber, with God and the white Minster Towers for sole witnesses, had the hopeful visions of girlish days gone over, and made way for the lagging footsteps of those waiting years which were ended too. Here had my father died, my two young brothers, and my darling mother. Hence Isabel had gone in her childish loveliness, Jean in her bridal beauty, and Stephen in his vain, wasteful youth. Not a bird in the old nest but me!

I went through every room with the melancholy

certainly that these sacred home-scenes would behold me no more. In my closet I stood to take one last gaze at the towers in the sunshine; then fell on my knees by the window, and wept and prayed. There was none to see my agony; none to come and sever this dumb tie quickly; none to bid me be resigned or comforted. As in every other great crisis of my life, I had to act alone. After a while I went down-stairs again: there was a ray of evening purple through the stained window, making its first touch on the broad ledge. I sat down there and watched the colours come out upon the walls, the steps, and the banisters. When they were at their brightest, I went away through the stone hall and out into the shady court, with confused echoes of old days ringing in my ears, and blinding tears in my eyes.

No longer a *first* object to any one; without a hearth by which I could claim a seat; free to work, and free to wander where I would—so accustomed had I been to loving service, that my liberty was now my burden.

“Let me put a brave face on my fortunes,” said I, by way of raising my spirits. And thus I departed from Eversley, to return to it no more for years.

XL.

When any person has reached the points of time and experience when peace and quietness have come to be regarded as the chief blessings in life, to be suddenly domesticated in a house with twins is, I humbly submit, a trial of Christian patience and charity. My sister-in-law's babies seemed to pervade the whole establishment: if they were not to be met taking an airing alternately on the staircase, in the grasp of a short, clumsily-built little girl, who was nearly overbalanced by their weight, a stormy chorus of cries was to be heard from the nursery. The room appropriated to my use was under the roof, with a square foot of window opening on the tiles, which gave a limited prospect of the sky, and nothing

else. The twins were immediately below, so that retreat there was none.

Stephen had formerly described Flora to me as a bit of genuine, unspoilt nature, and therefore my expectations were moderate. On my arrival I found her sitting in state in a small gaudily-furnished drawing-room; and having been prepared to see a severely punctilious, orderly person, she received me with a nervous ceremoniousness which made her manner positively unkind: she seemed to be entering her protest, at once, against any interference in her domestic arrangements, or rather disarrangements. My first sentiment was one of regret that I had come to Stephen's house at all. Flora did not make me welcome, and this was not wonderful; for Stephen had been in the habit of continually proposing me as a model to his negligent young wife, and she resented it, naturally enough.

She was a rather pretty little person, with a nice figure and small features; but she dressed in such a tawdry style, and was so indolent and self-indulgent, that her youthful bloom was fast fading,

and a querulous, tired expression succeeding to it. Any useful occupation she regarded as quite beneath her, considering the fortune that she had brought Stephen; so Jemima—Jemmy she was called for short—managed, or mismanaged, the twins, and two other servants ruled the house. It was very uncomfortable, disorderly, and irregular in consequence; and though Stephen found fault daily, Flora resigned herself to her novel or her worsted parrot after it with perfect equanimity. She imagined herself in delicate health, whereas all she needed was fresh air and wholesome exercise. It was impossible to stir her from her easy-chair or her sofa for a walk. She occasionally went out shopping, and brought home some frippery for the decoration of her own little person, or a new gewgaw for her crowded toy drawing-room; but anything further was beyond her strength. She had a good many complaints to pour into my ears concerning the trials and privations of her married life, in which it was impossible deeply to sympathise, because they were so entirely selfish. Instead of identifying herself

with Stephen's interests, she set up a scheme of superior luxury for herself, founded on that fortune of hers, to which she referred daily with pride. I found my brother much subdued in temper since his marriage. Flora was so blindly exacting and wilfully perverse, that, no doubt, he was glad to let her have her own way for quietness' sake. If he denied her extravagant whims, she would fret and sulk for two or three days together, taking intervals of rest during his absence from the house, that she might look all the sourer when he came in. Neither was strong enough or persistent enough to rule the other, so that their contentions were perpetually renewed, and very uneasy I felt in the midst of them.

I made my work presently with the twins, which were sometimes quite too much for Jemmy. Flora never attended to them, except in a fine lady-like way, so that it was marvellous they fared as well as they did. Jemmy did not resent my intrusion in her domains; but was glad, indeed, of help. She was a funny little creature, slightly deformed, with an intelligent, shrewd face,

full of kindness. The twins knew and liked her quite as well, if not better, than their mother. She used to turn them, all shining with soap and friction, into their respective cots every night, and then sit down and *talk* them to sleep. She told long, rambling histories, half romance, half fairy-tale, coined, I believe, in her own brain, for she could not read. She must have studied elocution under a course of provincial methodist preachers, for her voice had the monotonous, impressive drawl peculiar to those persons, and it had a truly lulling, sedative effect. Minnie and Steenie slept like tops under it.

But my residence under Stephen's roof was not destined to be of long continuance. Something of order and regularity I contrived to introduce; but Flora, though she would do nothing herself, was extremely tenacious of her prerogatives as mistress of the house, and said the servants respected my orders more than they did hers. She also alluded to her fortune, and to what she was pleased to designate my beggary, in a very disagreeable manner. In short, I found that my position there

could never be anything but that of the poor relation, and I did not like it; therefore, never having been averse to work in all her days, Kathie Brande made up her mind to face the world again, and eat bread of her own winning—which, even though coarse and scant, would not, at least, sting her palate with the bitter flavour of dependence. Stephen was vexed at my resolve, and made Flora cry by threatening to emigrate—a threat which only made me hasten my departure, lest it should become a bone of contention between the two.

XLI.

Willingly would I pass over the painful months of striving with fortune for mere bread to eat that followed this change; but why slur over the bitter experience that has its thousand counterparts in that great London this very day? My lodging was one little room, very clean and airy, with a view over the house-tops, as far as the smoke would suffer me to see; glimpses of greenness

showed amongst the labyrinth, here and there; and even to the house in which I was a lodger, there was attached a strip of garden as large and as fresh as that in Percie Court.

I applied myself with a good heart to my new life: advertised for pupils, and then began, in the interval of waiting for them, to embellish my abode. New bright chintz converted my boxes into ottomans; a book-case was contrived on the top of the chest of drawers, where my few precious volumes, saved from the wrecks of home, made a decent show; my mother's picture hung over the mantel-piece; and the parting gifts of my scholars further served to set off my little den. At first, too, I always indulged myself with a tiny nosegay of flowers, but that I soon had to retrench. The expenses of the last few months at Eversley had not left me with much money in my purse, but I cannot call to mind that any dread of actual want ever occurred to me. If it had I should have staved it off by reflecting that with the will to work, none need starve. At all events, when my finances were reduced to some-

thing less than four pounds, I expended more than one at a bookseller's shop in the purchase of Mr. Mayne's last work, which I saw advertised in the columns of a newspaper, lent to me, when it was a week old, by my landlady.

And that book was better than wine to me! It cheered and refreshed me as nothing else could have done. Why might I not follow him in thought still, and take pride and pleasure in his success? It was dear to me as ever: though we might never more meet as friends, it was not surely wrong to remember that once we had loved! The tone of this book was deeper, higher, purer, stronger—his great heart was made manifest in it. I loved that book, I shall always love it. To my own loneliness it brought life: it brought more; it brought the assurance that Felix was happy.

For a week or two I was eminently content in my new abode; I read, wrote, sewed, and walked out. Stephen came to see me, and Jemmy brought the twins in a basket carriage; but soon I discovered, that with so light a purse, my occupations ought to be more profitable.

“*N’importe!*” said I to myself, fearlessly, “you are alone; nobody depends on you for bread, and your wants are easily satisfied.”

So, indeed, they were; but not being ethereal enough to exist on *n’importe*, I made strenuous researches after pupils. At last, after many personal applications, repulses and failures, I met with a family who would give fifteen pounds annually for the instruction of two little girls in English, music, and any minor accomplishments that I might choose to throw in for the money. I accepted the post with thanks, and was taught to feel myself extremely fortunate in having got it; for my deficiencies in the matter of general accomplishments debarred me from obtaining any thing else. By rights, I could claim nothing beyond a decent acquaintance with my own language, with history, geography, and the elementary branches of education; and I found that a governess was expected to be proficient in various arts and sciences: to be, in short, a universal teacher. I always have had a strong desire to see one of those ladies who know all the

'ologies, modern languages, with Greek and Latin for boys, music and singing without a master, drawing in various styles, dancing and deportment; but hitherto my wish has not been gratified, and I am beginning to think them fabulous, notwithstanding the advertisements to the contrary. This engagement was for three hours daily; but after several contemptuous rejections of my services, and one offer that I should accept the post of nurse to a delicate boy, I determined to find some other additional means of subsistence, as it was clear I could not live on fifteen pounds paid half-yearly. I did anything—embroidery, worsted-work, bead-work, and copying work for my landlady's brother, an attorney—that paid the best; I *lived*, in short, and necessity had quickened me out of the torpor of sorrow and ease. I was not unhappy—perhaps, having my faculties on the stretch was good for me; there have been times when, surrounded with far more earthly goods and better prospects, I was less content.

XLII.

Whenever I come in sight of a great sorrow—either a crisis in my own life or in that of any of those dear to me—it seems as if my pen approached it with slow reluctance. There is a deep pathos in the faces of those pale phantoms which haunt the shores of the waters of life, as if they would say, “Bless us; we have been blessed to you.” They are sacred—to be spoken of gently; not with wild cries or ear-splitting exclamations.

It was dark night; the rain pattered against the window, the wind howled and whistled fitfully through the deserted streets. I had not lit my candle, but sat in the red light of the fire, watching the faces that glowed in it. I often passed half-an-hour thus, thinking, but not moodily, on the scenes which memory conjured up in those still and lonely days. It seemed long, very long, since I had lost home and home-happiness. I

had ceased to count the days when I had been alienated from love and hope. I lived in perpetual shadow; not beneath the black cloud of present agony, but in the undisturbed quiet and gloom of twilight, after the effulgence and reflection of the sun have gone down and left a solemn grey silence on the spirit of mortality. The stream of existence poured on with me smoothly; I floated companionless: old friends rode proudly on its waves, far out of my track. Perhaps, I thought, they are some of them freighted with far deeper woe, careering majestically on the full, free tide, than I, drifting slowly before the breeze in the shadow of the bank.

No friendly face had I seen for many months, except sometimes the fire gave them to my eye, and that was why I sat by it so often idle. Sometimes I wondered if, within that great city, there were many who from day to day and week to week heard the tone of no loving voice; and if there were, how they bore it. Whether they brooded in solitude till sense failed, or whether they went out into the streets and made themselves

friends of strangers, or patiently bore the yoke till time lightened it, or sought a strength greater than their own to enable them to cast it off.

It was dark night: wind and rain revelling without; I and my companion, the fire, which has a friendly face at all times, within. I bent down close towards it, for it was very cold, and spread my hands to its warmth, shivering, as steps passed to and fro in the street, for all who were abroad in such a storm. I had speculated on the tone of the footsteps until to each I had assigned a meaning. When they sprang lightly and clearly from the ground, it seemed that the form must be young, the spirit that swayed it buoyant, and the will that guided it free; when they pressed steadily forward, I thought that worldly cares had descended, but not yet heart-sorrows; when they were faint and wavering, hurrying and lingering by turns, I knew that the showers of affliction were falling, and that the wayfarer hesitated whether to seek shelter from their merciless fury or to abide them patiently; when they were heavy and irregular,

I knew that passion or desperation were hurrying them on in their flight from swift pursuing thought. Many steps there were that went by with the same plodding, echoless tramp: they had the tone of the common herd whose portion is labour; who have no time to live inwardly; whose first and last thought is how they shall extract bread from the stones around them to sustain life from day to day.

One step there was with purpose in it: a step that came inevitably, fair or foul, fast-day or festival; sharp, quick, sudden; a step I listened for every day and every night; checked rarely at the door of my dwelling, but pausing at others, when the street was roused from its lethargy by the familiar double rap, and heads appeared at doors and windows to watch the transit of the postman. The bearer of good and evil tidings; Death's messenger sometimes, and sometimes Love's; but for that his step neither lagged nor hastened. The postman to our street was a small weather-beaten man, short and surly in his answers to all queries, and very impatient indeed

if his postage were not instantly forthcoming. We used to meet in the mornings, and exchange a nod as I went to my teaching; and at night he was my clock; for after he had gone by it was time to wrap up work and idle for half-an-hour. But on this particular night a listless fit had overtaken me; I wished I had a friend to come in and lighten the stillness of my solitary evening with a little talk: so it came to pass that three hours went over, post time came, and I was still doing nothing—nothing but thinking and wishing. Nine o'clock struck, and five minutes after came the steady tramp; I raised the blind, and looked out into the street; there was the postman on the opposite side of the way, with his oilskin cape shining with rain and lamplight, and his hat down over his brows. He crossed to our door, and gave that double rap which, at one time or other, has quickened all our pulses.

The servant was a long while in going to the door, but at last she scurried along the passage and opened it. It clashed to again immediately, and she went back singing to her kitchen. I

felt a little shade of disappointment, for I had hoped there might be a letter for me from Jean, or from somebody else. I am one of those people who feel personally obliged to the postman when he brings me anything; and who, when I am disappointed, bear an unreasonable animosity, as if he had defrauded me of my due.

Think of the monotony of a life in which a letter from nobody in particular would be felt as a pleasant incident! Such would it have been to me many a time during those months which followed my departure from Eversley. But for that night my chance seemed gone; so I rose up, and gave the fire a poke, saying, in a kind of desperation, "Well, then, I will read for half an hour."

I got down that old common-place-book which Felix had once left at our house, and began to read some of the extracts, with his comments attached. Here is one that struck me particularly:—

"The night once come, our happiness, our unhappiness—it is all abolished, vanished, clean

gone, a thing that has been—not of the slightest consequence. But our Work—behold that is not abolished, that has not vanished. Our Work—behold that remains, or the want of it remains; and that is now the sole question with us for evermore.

“What hast thou done—and how?”

“Where is thy work? Swift! out with it! Let us see thy Work.”

And another from the same writer—

“In a valiant suffering for others, not in a slothful making others suffer for us, did nobleness ever lie. The chief of men is he who stands in the van of men; fronting the peril which frightens back all others; which if it be not vanquished will devour the others. Every noble crown is, and on earth will for ever be, a crown of thorns.”

Immediately below, followed these lines from Byron's poem of “Don Juan”:

“— words are things, and a small drop of ink
 Falling, like dew, upon a thought, produces
 That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.”

Then came a short dissertation on this text, touching the responsibility of authorship: like seed sown at the way side are the principles and sentiments scattered by the whim or the earnest of men of letters. There is no saying who will pick them up, or to what use they may be put: whether they will strengthen like a moral tonic, or pervert and warp like a poisonous draught; whether they will encourage to the pursuit of true nobleness, or turn waverers back with a sneering surety to their own weak devices.

While I was thinking on this rather vaguely and wearily, the door opened, the stout Irish servant entered, and laid a letter before me.

“A letter, m'm, just come, post-paid,” said she, and walked out again.

I snatched at it eagerly, not very well pleased that it had been kept for a ten minutes' examination in the lower regions. It was a foreign letter in a strange handwriting. It was from Reginald Pompe, who wrote desiring me to go immediately to Paris to my sister Isabel. She had been

confined, and nothing would satisfy her but seeing me. The vehemence of this desire absolutely retarded her recovery, Mr. Pompe wrote, and he begged me not to lose an hour in hastening to her side.

There is one advantage in not being encumbered with much worldly pelf: it is easy to go from place to place when no cares of friends or fortune have to be left behind. My possessions were packed in a single hour; and having notified the necessity of my immediate departure to my two pupils, I set off; and on the second day from that on which I received the summons, I was in Paris, with Isabel.

XLIII.

I was taken up to my sister's room the moment I arrived; she was so impatient and restless for my coming. For the first ten minutes we were perfectly incoherent. I looked at Bella, and kissed her, and cried over her. A tall woman

in a queer cap showed me the baby, all lace and muslin and pinkish countenance. I kissed and cried over that too. Perhaps nobody ever behaved in such a foolish way either before or since; but the young mother seemed quite to understand and participate.

She asked if I did not envy her.

Then the child was handed over to its mother, and the nurse went away with my bonnet and cloak; for as yet Isabel would not suffer me out of sight.

“I feel so safe with you there, Kathie,” she said, pleasantly; so I sat down and listened to the “little language” the mother and child exchanged until my turn came again.

I had laid my hand on the counterpane, and Isabel put hers upon it, looking at me silently for some minutes through eyes swimming in tears.

“Oh, Kathie! the things that have been and gone since we two parted,” she said with a sad smile, touching the sleeve of my black dress. She thought of our mother. “If I could only

have seen her! But I was ill, and Reginald kept the news back lest it should make me worse."

She stooped over the child, and a great tear fell upon its face and woke it.

"That is unlucky!" sighed she, wiping it off and kissing the little thing passionately. "Will thy mother ever bring thee aught but ill-luck, my pet! Oh, Kathie! since I went away from home I have often thought that I should have been better and happier if I had stayed there. Hush! what nonsense am I talking! Could I be anywhere happier than with my darling?"

Then there was another interlude of petting and cooing, from which Isabel lifted her face with a forced smile.

"We shall all be happy now, and content: you will stay with me, and Reginald will—no matter. Kathie, I am so glad, so very glad, because of the child," and she began to weep aloud.

Judge if I was satisfied for poor, wilful Isabel's happiness.

We had been together about an hour when

Reginald Pompe came into his wife's room. If I had not known how plausible and gracious he could be, I might have been deceived into liking him, his manner to Isabel and the child was so gentle and caressing. My sister glanced at me triumphantly, as if she would call to my mind the warnings I had given her, and bid me observe how useless they were.

Reginald did not stay long: he could leave her to me without anxiety, he said.

Isabel seemed disappointed, and whispered that it was the first time she had seen him that day; but he had the ever ready excuse of an engagement.

“And where are you going to-night, Reginald?” his wife asked, detaining him by the hand as he was turning away.

“To your beloved friend Anastasie: Milicent will be there, and your aunt Aurelia; have you any commands?”

“No, thank you.”

At the name of Anastasie, Isabel's mouth twitched nervously, and she loosed her hold on

her husband's hand. He paused irresolutely for a second or two, then kissed her, and bidding me take care of her, went out.

After this my sister did not seem disposed to talk any more, and asked me to draw the curtain to shade the firelight from her eyes.

Presently the nurse brought me some coffee, and told me that her mistress ought to take an hour's rest: she gave me a book, therefore, to beguile the time, and left me sitting by the bed. For some time there was complete silence, but one or two smothered sobs betrayed that Isabel did not sleep. I would not intrude on this sorrow which she wished to hide, but when she began whispering to the child, I came forward and spoke.

"Oh, Kathie! are you there? I fancied myself alone," she said softly. "What o'clock is it—nearly ten?"

It was not yet nine.

"Are you sure the timepiece has not stopped?"

Yes; it had not stopped, I told her.

After lying very still for about ten minutes,

she added with a touch of her old, impatient manner, "It has seemed a long day, such a weary long day lying here: I shall be so glad to be up again. The lives we lead do not make us patient lingerers in sick rooms, Kathie."

I glanced at the sleeping child beside her, thinking that *there* should be unfailing pleasure to her.

"I expected so much from him," she said quietly, following the direction of my eyes. "I fancied he would bring back everything; but it is not to be."

I did not ask what was "not to be," for she seemed to be thinking aloud, and I understood her to allude to Reginald.

"No, it is not to be!" she repeated, caressing the child; "he will be proud of you, baby—he will love you; but he is tired of poor me. Oh, mother! why did I leave you?"

Ah, Isabel! you had met with troubles grievous to be borne, but the old house under the shadow of the Minster was not safe from sorrow: its quiet rooms had heard bitter sobs, and witnessed

many an agony of tears. Pain and anguish would have found you out under that shelter as easily as in the wider world where your lot was cast.

“Kathie, you have told me nothing of yourself,” said my sister after a long interval of silence; “come and sit where I can see you, and talk to me. Begin from the time you saw me in London before I was married, and tell me all.”

“What is there to tell that you do not know already, Isabel? Stephen and Jean married—our mother dead.”

“And has that been all your experience in these years, Kathie? Do not tell me that; there is something else that you keep back—something that has turned your brown hair grey, and made your eyes so deep and serious. Why not tell our troubles to each other? Are we not sisters? What of that Felix Mayne who came to our house the last Christmas I was at home? Did not the course of that true love run smooth?”

I shrank as if she had rudely touched an

aching nerve. She stopped and looked at me wistfully.

“Oh, Kathie! I have pained you: forgive me, I did not mean it. We are half strangers to each other; are we not?”

“I don't feel strange with you, Isabel.”

“Perhaps you think I am as wilful and gay at heart as I was when you saw me last,” she went on; “but there are things that change us. When I once told you that I was proud and happy to accept my fate whatever Reginald should make it, I spoke truth. I would not change it for that of any woman I know. I can bear my husband's coldness, remembering how he once loved me, and how tender he can still be when he will. But I ought never to have married him, Kathie: it would have broken my heart to be separated from him then, but now I see that I am not clever or brilliant enough to retain him. I am only a cipher amongst the fascinating women here. They can amuse while I only weary him. It is very sad for a wife, Kathie, when her husband is weary of her; and Reginald

shows it. I hoped when baby came he would love me a little more; but no: he leaves me all day for his friends."

Her great tears were falling on the child's face—a baptism of sorrow—but Isabel did not heed them.

"Mrs. Pompe says his neglect means nothing, and that I ought to support it with dignity; but I cannot be dignified where I am not indifferent. Perhaps you can teach me a better consolation, Kathie?"

I could only listen in silent pity.

"You cannot! I must go on in the old way then, opposing nothing but love to his harshness, for he has often said very cruel and bitter words to me in his anger; perhaps I may win him back at last. Oh! if he were ill, in pain, or in misery, who would serve him as I would? Not Anastasie! not any base friend of them all!"

"That would they not, Isabel! your heart has led you to the best and safest revenge!" I eagerly exclaimed, desirous to soothe her, and at the same time to check the complaints that per-

haps, on the morrow, she would regret having uttered.

“He is with Anastasie now. She is a vain, clever woman without beauty, but she is the fashion; and to be first in her train, he sacrifices me. It is wicked and selfish, Kathie, and you can have no conception how it tortures me to know it. She is married too, and six months ago she was my friend—my *friend*: that woman who was to work me such misery and desolation! It makes me almost mad to think.”

There was a passionate sparkle in her eyes for a minute or two, but it was soon quenched in tears; she bowed down her face over the sleeping child, and murmured self-reproachfully, “Oh, my baby! he has given thee to me. I must, I will bear all for thy sake. Kathie, don't remember what I have said—I had no right to speak so; but seeing your dear old face opened my heart, and it was very full.”

For a little while she wept violently; then, with the child clasped close to her bosom, she fell into a weary, exhausted slumber, in which I left

her; for the nurse came and whispered that excitement always made Madame ill, and that I had better not be there when she awoke.

It seemed as if poor Isabel's misery were achieved: none of my presentiments had gone farther than this. Reginald treated her with a careless negligence, which showed that her power over him was utterly gone. Sometimes he would come into her room for five minutes before hurrying out for his morning ride or visits, but quite as frequently he only sauntered in towards evening when going to dress for dinner. He took a great deal of notice of the child, and set much store by its well-being, but did not testify any anxiety about its mother.

"You see I am nothing now, Kathie," she said with a bitter smile, as he left the room after one of these visits—"less than nothing; he hummed one of Anastasie's songs to please baby."

It was not a very cheerful room in which Isabel lay. The house was between a court and garden, and her windows opened upon a mossy

stone balcony overlooking the latter. Withered sprays of rose and jasmine, gay and fragrant in summer, twined about the carved balustrades, and beyond were a few great elm and lime trees, all bare and grey; the grass-plot was overgrown and sodden with melted snow, and in the middle a small ill-fed fountain kept up day and night a dreary tinkling of solitary water-drops.

On the first day that Isabel sat up, she remarked that it was a melancholy place, and I proposed that she should change to the little salon which was on the same floor, and opened into a tiny conservatory. But she objected, without giving any reason. On this morning, Milicent Pompe came with her mother to see the child, and stayed a long while. Milicent would give us all the details of a splendid entertainment at Anastasie's house, though Isabel's want of interest almost trenched on rudeness.

“Anastasie was very brilliant and animated: what a truly fascinating woman she is!” exclaimed Milicent enthusiastically: “it is not to be wondered at that she is so successful in society.

Sybil Froude, and some other English women who were there, looked as if they had been nourished on iced curds and whey, while her lips seemed never to have imbibed anything cooler than sunbeams—‘lips touched with fire:’ she is witty and full of genius. Don’t you admire her very much? By the by, she said she was coming to see you.”

“I shall not receive her,” replied Isabel, raising her eyes, bright with indignation. There was a momentary silence.

“Why not? you were the warmest friends a month or two since,” said Milicent, apparently surprised at Isabel’s sudden warmth.

“I will not receive her,” repeated she firmly: “Kathie, I depend on you to give orders that I am denied to everybody.”

Mrs. Pompe, up to this moment, had been engaged in a quarrel with the nurse, as to whether the baby should or should not be subject to the quackeries of the Dean’s lady. Hearing Isabel’s resolute order, and being just at the same moment worsted in her contention with the nurse, she

rejoined the little circle by the fire, not in the most placable mood, apparently.

“Stay, Miss Brande: let nothing be done rashly,” she exclaimed, with a dignified gesture of the hand. “Now, Isabel, have you reflected how such an order will irritate my son? Of course you have not, or you could never have given it.”

“Reginald cannot desire me to receive persons who are disagreeable to me,” answered my sister, flushing, and then turning as pale as marble.

“And pray, why is Anastasie disagreeable to you? Have you any reason that you are prepared to assign for such an unaccountable freak? Three months ago you and Anastasie were inseparable: you almost lived together. How will this sudden break look to the world? Reginald will never let you make him ridiculous with impunity. Let me advise you to think better of it.”

Isabel looked proud and defiant: “My mind is made up,” said she quietly.

“Then you may also make it up to troublesome

consequences: we all know what Reginald is," returned Milicent.

"It does not befit you to insinuate anything against your brother," said Mrs. Pompe, angrily. "Why cannot Isabel act like a woman of the world, instead of letting this paltry jealousy peep out? It is very insulting to Reginald, who only admires Anastasie because other men do. Let the fever-fit burn itself out; receive Anastasie as usual: she is a coquette, but she has not a bad heart."

"I will not see her; I will not be insulted by her false kindnesses; I wonder how you can expect that I should so debase myself!" cried my sister, passionately.

Mrs. Pompe rose with great dignity, and said she was sorry to witness such headstrong folly; she could not interfere further, and Isabel must act as she pleased, and be responsible for the consequences. Milicent also gave a few words of advice; but finding her sister-in-law not disposed to attend to them, she went her way with raised eyebrows and gloomy predictions.

XLIV.

Once on that day, and twice on the succeeding, an elegant carriage drove into the court-yard with Anastasie, to make inquiries after her dear friend. On the last occasion she descended, and came up to the *salon*, whither the nurse went to answer her questions. She left very reluctantly, after sending many messages of regret and condolence to Isabel.

It was during the evening of this day that Reginald came to his wife's apartment in a very angry and resentful state of mind. "Anastasie tells me she has been here three times, and that she was not permitted to see you; how is that?" he began.

"I have seen no one yet; I cannot bear to receive company."

"Nonsense! Affectation! Since when have you begun to consider Anastasie company?"

"Reginald, you know why I object to that

woman ; it is cruel of you to urge me to see her : you might leave me in peace, at least ! ”

“ Don't be a fool, Isabel ! ” said her husband fiercely, whilst his iron fingers compressed her slender wrist : “ how dare you say I am cruel ? I will not suffer you to make me and yourself ridiculous. Anastasie will come again to-morrow ; you will receive her without exhibiting any of this sudden aversion : you will obey me in this matter. ”

He looked menacingly at her poor, flushed face, as he reiterated the last words.

“ No, Reginald, I will not ; you shall not make me : you have no right to compel me to obedience here, and you shall not, ” replied she, clenching her trembling hands, and meeting his eyes unflinchingly.

He returned her gaze coldly for a minute or two, then broke into a taunting laugh. That laugh seemed to torture her ten times more than his rage : she got up, and walked rapidly through the room, then came back to her former place, and asked him what it meant.

“It means this, Isabel,” he replied, in an icy passionless way, which showed he was uttering no vague threat: “it means that you may take your way and I will take mine, as I offered to you once before. Kirklands is always ready to receive you: a very proper retreat for a rebellious wife. Paris suits me better. You can go whenever you feel equal to it: here I stay.”

“And the child, Reginald?” said his wife, trying to be as proud and cold as he was.

“The child? Oh, of course, he will stay here too. I shall find a proper person to take charge of him.”

“Oh, you *know* I cannot leave *him!*” she murmured, clasping the child close to her heart, and turning her fever-lustred eyes on her husband.

“You not only *can* but *shall*, if you do not come to reason speedily,” returned he, in an accent of concentrated passion. “Do not treat me to any more of these scenes—they grow wearisome and uninteresting; it is of no use to cry, tears only waste your beauty. I know only

one woman who can weep and look lovely at the same time."

"She is a better actress than I am!" cried Isabel in a burst of sobs.

"Pshaw! I am not in the humour for a fit of sentimentals; neither shall I suffer you to make an *escalandre* for nothing. My mother, who is a sensible woman in her way, gave you some advice, and if you know what is good for you, you will act upon it; otherwise you may go to Kirklands. I don't care which."

"No, Reginald, I am sure you do not! It is many a long day since you cared for me. If you will let me take the boy, I will relieve you of my presence to-morrow," said Isabel bitterly.

"But I will not let you take the boy; and if you go to Kirklands, you go alone: *alone*, mind!" retorted her husband, glancing at me. "Besides, you cannot travel. What would everybody say but that I was a barbarian, a monster, if I suffered you to attempt it? and that would gratify you, perhaps. Where is all that love you used to prate about when you persist in thwarting me at every

turn, and covering me with ridicule by your insane jealousy?"

The veins in his temples swelled like cords, and his eyes scintillated with passion. Isabel seemed to cower before them: she bore his gaze for a minute, then turned and hid her face amongst the cushions of the couch.

He laid his hand heavily on her shoulder, and went on in a hoarse voice: "This is the last time I will bear with your folly. If I find you in my way I will send you out of it. Had it not been for the scandal of the thing, you should have gone the last time you tormented me. You imagine injuries where none are."

"Reginald, answer me!" exclaimed his wife, suddenly turning the full light of her passionate eyes upon him. "Would you tamely endure that any man should pursue me as you pursue Anastasie? Would you let people talk of me as they do of her?"

"So far as love goes—yes, with sublime indifference; but where my honour is concerned, it would be dangerous to provoke me. I would

crush you—I would kill you as I would a worm, rather than that should be touched by you!”

“Go away! leave me!” cried Isabel in a choked voice. “Go!” She waved him off with her hand. He laughed in his icy, taunting way as he went to the door.

“Remember Anastasie!” he said in a warning tone. “I can trust you on every point but that. Good-night. Don’t agitate yourself any more, for the boy’s sake,” and he went out.

Then Isabel crept on her knees to the child’s cot, and laid her face down upon it, sobbing in agony.

“Oh, I wish I were dead! I wish I were dead!” she gasped again and again.

I drew near to soothe her, but she pushed me fiercely away.

“Let me alone! I want nobody—I only want to die!” she said with bitterness, and, gathering the child into her arms, she sat on the ground weeping over and caressing it.

She was not fit to be left; and I was glad when the nurse, a woman of great firmness and kindness

combined, came in and induced her to lie down in her bed.

The result of this scene was an attack of fever ; and on the morrow, when Anastasie came, Isabel was asleep under the influence of a sedative draught. The nurse had received her orders from her master ; and while I was watching by my sister she admitted a tall lady, whom she named to me as Madame's friend. She bent her head haughtily, and then with velvet foot crossed to the sofa, and sat down to wait Isabel's waking.

I watched her : she was exquisitely dressed, and her movements were slow, undulating, and graceful. She was young, but her countenance was displeasing ; her mouth wide, and too full lipped ; her eyes dark and fierce, yet stealthy ; her brow low, and surmounted by thick braids of black hair ; her skin was swarthy, but otherwise perfectly colourless. I imagined it a countenance that would light up with the glow of passion or the fury of jealous rage ; but of tenderness, sweetness, or womanly modesty, it had no trace. She sat supporting her chin on her hand, with her eyes on

the carpet, motionless as a statue, for a considerable time; her lips slightly apart, and the small, even teeth within close set, as if she were keeping in a storm. Once Isabel moaned in her sleep, and in an instant Anastasie was beside the bed, holding back the curtains and gazing at her with her evil eyes. I could hear her drawing her breath heavily as she stood there; and never before nor since have I seen on any human face such an expression of malevolence as hers then wore.

While in this posture, Reginald's footstep was heard in the small salon adjoining. She lifted her head, listened a moment, and then went out to him. About ten minutes after her carriage drove out of the courtyard, and he came up into the room, and sharply asked the nurse if her mistress usually slept at that time of the day. The woman replied that Madame had had an attack of fever the night before, and that the physician had ordered her a sleeping draught. He gave one scrutinizing, baffled glance at Isabel, and then went away again. Anastasie came no more after this; and for some reason, best known to himself, Reginald

never alluded to the circumstances of this visit before his wife, though he took many unmistakable ways of testifying his anger and resentment. He came daily to see the child, but often departed without a word to Isabel; but her impetuosity broke out no more in reproaches, and her tears were shed in secret, if they were shed at all. As for Reginald, he was like ice or adamant to her.

XLV.

Colonel Longstaff and Aunt Aurelia were at this time residing in Paris. They had lived abroad entirely ever since their marriage. It was a pleasure to see how happy they were together: no young creatures in the first blush of their youth and love could have been more fondly attached than they were.

There was no cordiality, however, between the Colonel and Reginald Pompe; so that a coldness had sprung up between their wives, and they rarely met except in society. I went alone

to see my aunt, and she spoke to me with distress of the quarrels between Isabel and Reginald, which showed that they were known. Milicent had been her informant; Isabel had never complained to her, but always in public put a smiling face on her troubles.

When I had been in Paris about two months, Mrs. Pompe and her daughter returned to England—a change which delighted me; for her interference with the child, and her lectures to Isabel, were aggravating in the highest degree—were, indeed, scarcely to be endured in silence by the meekest spirited woman; how much less, then, by my sister. They never met without recrimination.

As spring advanced, Isabel returned to her ordinary manner of life. She visited a great deal, and I saw very little of her; the want of my care was past, and I proposed to leave her; to this, however, she was quite averse.

“I cannot exist without excitement now,” she said: “if I sit down to think, my brain is in a whirl as if I were going mad. But don’t

leave me, Kathie: I feel as if you were my safety."

So I remained.

When the weather became warm we went to a country villa about seven miles from Paris; Reginald stayed behind. Occasionally he rode over to see the child, but for his wife he continued to exhibit the coldest indifference. If she were at home when he came, he spoke to her with bare civility; if she were absent, he never condescended to ask after her. His manner towards me was marked by a certain haughty politeness, and he once expressed his satisfaction that I stayed with Isabel; but we cordially disliked each other notwithstanding.

Circumstances were, however, preparing to draw these two closer together for a short space. From the hour of his birth the child had been strong and healthy; the first few months of his life passed without any of those alarms which usually beset the cradles of only sons, who are besides heirs to great estates. For some unexplained reason, Reginald conceived a dislike

for the nurse, whom Isabel altogether approved ; she was discharged, and her place filled by a woman whom Anastasie recommended. From this day the child began to pine : he was seized with convulsive fits, and gradually dwindled away. Isabel, at first, refused to see this change ; her heart was so bound up in his existence that she would not acknowledge cause for fear. The new nurse, a plausible soft-spoken woman, encouraged this feeling of safety, and for several days the doctor was not sent for ; at last, on my own responsibility, I despatched a messenger both to him and Reginald, and they arrived together. The latter had not been over for ten days, and the change in the child's appearance greatly shocked him ; the physician looked grave, and questioned the nurse so closely as to what she had given him in the way of food and medicine, and whether she had had any accident with him, that she flew into a passion, gave up her situation, and left us the same day. Reginald poured out frantic reproaches against her, against his wife, against me, and finally returned to Paris to seek

the first nurse, and send her back, and at the same time to call in the best medical aid that could be procured.

Isabel's eyes were now opened. From the moment her husband left the house on his return to Paris, she never suffered the child out of her arms: she held him in her lap, soothing his piteous wailings, weeping over him, praying for him passionately to God.

It was a bright August evening, warm, glowing; nature was in her happiest mood. A soft breeze stirred in the tree-tops, and flower-odours loaded the balmy air. My sister bade me go and walk in the avenue, to watch and give her warning of Reginald's return. It was pitiful to see the love that held by that frail little life; to hear the agony of supplication that broke from the mother's fevered lips, to be hushed by a fragment of a more humble prayer. In her trouble and anxiety the minutes seemed lengthened out into double hours. I went as she bade me, and stayed near the gates looking out.

There were many carriages and horsemen

coming out from Paris to the country to enjoy the air; but at length, amongst these leisurely pleasure-seekers, my stretched ear distinguished the hard gallop of a horse, and Reginald came in sight. He beckoned me to stay, and I did so. His face was white with excitement as he dismounted and asked me if the child lived. I replied that he did, and he strode hastily into the house and up to the room where Isabel was. I followed. The unhappy mother had laid the child upon the bed, and was kneeling beside him, with her face buried in her hands. He lay without motion—a little pale, worn image, breathing, and that was all. Reginald stood speechless for a second or two, looking from one to the other; then he laid his hand heavily on his wife's shoulder, and bade her rise.

She gazed up pitifully in his face. "Hush, Regy, be still!—don't you see?" she said in a voice full of awe.

"Are we to stand like stocks and see him die?" demanded her husband hoarsely. "Don't be a perverse, weak fool now; think of something

to be done: there will be time enough for this drivelling if ——”

There was the noise of another arrival—the physician and the nurse.

“Nothing can save him now,” I heard Isabel say as the professionally stealthy foot entered the chamber.

In that moment the young life ebbed away. The mother's arm was round the child; her eyes fastened on his still features; her lips murmuring disjointed fragments of the prayers that we used to say when we were little ones at home together.

After a time she attempted to rise, but was so exhausted with suffering that she fainted, and would have fallen but that Reginald caught her in his arms. He carried her to another room, and laid her down on the couch.

“See to her, Kathie; do not leave her,” he said to me; and then returned to the chamber where the dead child lay, and locked himself in. He had felt a very deep, natural love for it, and his grief was sincere, though angry and bitter. Pro-

bably it was not free from the sting of self-reproach.

Early the next morning he came out of the room, and without seeing anyone rode off to Paris. I was with my sister, who had remained through the night in a state of lethargic insensibility; but the crush of the gravel under his horse's hoofs seemed to wake her out of her trance. She raised herself on her elbow, and looked round with an affrighted air.

“Who is that going away? Can it be Reginald?” she cried wildly. “Oh, I am alone!—quite, quite alone! My little child, my poor little baby is taken from me. O God! be merciful and take me too. Why cannot I die and be at rest?” The passionate complaint died into an inarticulate murmur.

I tried to speak to her of the angel she had in heaven—her early gathered darling; but her sore heart would not hearken.

“Oh, Kathie, you cannot know—for you have never felt it—how that tender thing was knit to my very soul!” she said plaintively. “He was

my only one, and I did so count on him to bring back Reginald to me. But now that tie is broken, and my hope with it. Why cannot I close my eyes, and open them no more on this miserable world?"

If death came at our first impatient call, how many of us would live out our days?

Towards night Reginald returned, and saw his wife for a few minutes. During the four days that intervened before the child's funeral, he always rode to Paris early, and came back at dusk. Immediately after it took place he gave orders for our removal altogether; and in the village churchyard he seemed to leave not his son's dust only, but his memory, for I never afterwards heard him utter his name. His grief and disappointment were intense: he sought his consolation with Anastasie.

And poor Isabel! It is only a mother's heart that can tell the long soreness that follows the rending away of those tender ties. For months she mourned as one without hope; her beauty waned; her spirit seemed utterly broken and

subdued. Then there came a sudden and total change. She threw off all symbols of her loss, avoided solitude, and plunged more recklessly than ever into the frivolities and extravagances of the society in the midst of which she lived. When I remonstrated with her, she answered me, "Kathie, if I sit any longer brooding over my troubles, I shall go mad. Sometimes I think I am almost half mad already."

XLVI.

I like to walk in the crowded thoroughfares and public resorts of a great city, and to watch the quaint faces and figures pass to and fro in the living panorama. When the mood contemplative is not on me the noise and bustle stir my blood, and make me wish that I had been of stronger frame and character; that, instead of a passive on-looker, I might have been an actor in the whirling vortex of life. Many an hour did I pass at this time in exploring the tortuous, narrow

streets of the ancient city, the gay boulevards, and quieter faubourgs.

I have been told that Paris is now so much improved in every part that I should scarcely know it again, and I should not refer to these rambles but for a particular incident which then occurred. I had entered a jeweller's shop to do some trifling commission for my sister, and was waiting to be attended to when a lady came in. She was English, from her face; its features I cannot describe, but it had sweetness, innocence, and modesty; youth, pure eyes, delicate bloom, and cheerfulness: it was one of those faces which, seen among strangers, touch us, we know not why; we do not forget them, though we have no association with them, and no name for their possessors. My remembrance of this bright face is no blind remembrance, however: it burnt itself a clear image on my memory amidst a haze of stormy emotions, which could not dim its sunshine, or impair its grace. She was alone buying a child's coral, and she made a long difficulty over her choice: she also looked often to the doorway,

as if expecting to be joined by some one. I was speaking to one of the men when I heard a step enter behind me, and a pleasant English voice said, "You are here at last, Felix."

There was no need for me to listen breathless for who should answer: did not that footfall wake every tumultuous echo in my heart? A deadly faintness crept over me, and I leant against the counter for support; it was only for an instant, but into that instant seemed compressed the essence of every agony that I had ever known. I staggered rather than walked out of the shop, with no thought but how I should get away, lest I should see Felix; I lost myself in a maze of streets, and then longed to go back to see if he were changed: to learn—if learn I could from look or tone—how dear was that beautiful young wife whose face had attracted me so much.

It was evil and wicked to feel as I felt for a few minutes. I tried to think that perhaps Felix did not love her as he had loved me; that she was cold, or proud, or passionate, or had some failing that would make him remember Kathie

with regret. It was wrong—I know it was wrong; I have nothing to plead in extenuation: it was the gasping cry of a love that I thought was dead, or at least for ever silent in my quiet heart.

I walked miles that day trying to leave thought and memory behind, but they clung to me like a poisoned garment. I might as well have tried to escape my gliding shadow. All that evening I spent alone. How it matters not. On the morrow, calm fell on me again—the dead calm of passive endurance. Had I not seen them, this corruption of my nature had lain unstirred. But such rencontres might occur again: was this storm of evil passion to lie seething in my heart, ready at any hour to lay it waste? I tried to think it down. Felix must love that fair young thing better than ever he had loved me: she must be so much dearer, as the true wife is, than the first fancy that men have. Still some hushed corner in his heart there *might* be sacred to the love of his youth: it quietened me to hope so, weak as it was.

Twice again I met them, but in the interval I

had communed with rebellious thought and mastered it. Perhaps my pulse quickened, but it was only a passing thrill. I was unrecognised, and it was best so: I could not have trusted myself in a cool, friendly greeting.

XLVII.

For some time past, Reginald had placed certain restrictions on the household expenses, which led me to suspect that he had had severe losses at play, or else that some other drain on his purse was begun. Isabel submitted without a word to the limit placed on her expenses: she would have welcomed utter poverty if it could have given her back her husband's love. I do not think that if he had been one of the best men in the universe she could have maintained for him throughout a more complete devotion; and aggrieved as she had been, and was daily, she would have been ready always to forgive him. I could scarcely sympathise with this. Mine was a

slower nature ; and all impressions, whether for good or ill, were deep and abiding : one look of contempt, one word of angry insult would have frozen my heart for ever.

One morning, when Isabel and I were sitting under the trees in the garden, each with a book, to which neither was paying much attention, Reginald came suddenly from the house in a state of violent excitement, and told us that preparations were to be made for an immediate return to England. He was sick of Paris, and longed to get out of it, he said. Isabel asked whither we were to go.

“To Kirklands,” was the brief reply ; and he left us in as great haste as he had come.

No explanation of this movement was vouchsafed, but my sister was eager to obey his orders ; though nothing could be done with speed enough to keep pace with Reginald’s impatience. Several days were needed to break up such an establishment as he had formed ; and as he absented himself, all the arrangements devolved on Isabel and me. We removed to an hotel, the servants

were discharged, the carriage, horses, and furniture sold, and we were ready to start, when Reginald told us we must wait until certain business that he had on hand was accomplished. It was an anxious interval: day after day slipped away until a fortnight had elapsed. Aunt Aurelia, who came to see us when she heard that we were returning to England, suggested to me that Reginald had only broken up his establishment that we might live at less expense. A shadow of probability there was about this; for when we were settled at the hotel, in the occupation of a small suite of rooms, I heard no more of going to England; and when Isabel urged on her husband a decision, all the answer she could extract was, "You must wait my time."

That this change of abode was preparatory to a final removal from Paris, Isabel was, notwithstanding, persuaded; and one evening we drove out together to the place where the child was buried: she wished to take a farewell of that sacred spot before abandoning it for ever.

As might be supposed, she was greatly over-

come by the remembrances it called up. She wept unrestrainedly as we returned to Paris; and on our reaching her room she fainted.

While I was attending to her I did not observe how agitated and confused was the maid who assisted me, but presently Aunt Aurelia, who had come during our absence, beckoned me to leave my sister, as she had something to communicate. She led me into the *salon*, where Colonel Longstaff was sitting. I saw that something frightful had occurred.

“Reginald was brought here about two hours ago dangerously wounded; and as you were absent, we were sent for,” said my aunt. “The surgeons are with him now, and the Colonel fears that he has but a poor chance. It is better that you should know the worst; but Isabel has been tried enough: keep it from her for to-day, unless he should desire to see her.”

“How did it occur?” I asked.

“A duel,” replied the Colonel—“a duel about some gambling quarrel most likely. He has

had more than one affair of that kind on his hands already.”

We waited long for the appearance of the surgeons, but when they at last came out of the room their faces were not those of men who leave death behind them; and we were immeasurably relieved to hear that, though painful and dangerous, the wound was not necessarily mortal, if the patient could be kept free from excitement.

A professional nurse was already installed in charge of him, and the surgeons advised that no other person should enter his room.

After this the Colonel and Aunt Aurelia went away home, promising to come back if any change supervened.

Isabel had not seen them, which was so far well, but when she recovered from her swoon, she seated herself in a particular window where she was in the habit of resting, for no other purpose than to watch her husband pass across the court in leaving and returning to the hotel. She had no suspicion of what had occurred, and might have been kept in ignorance for that night,

had not Reginald sent a message that he wanted to see me immediately.

“I did not know he was in,” my sister remarked with surprise, and I left her.

I found Reginald exhausted and suffering, but quiet; and the nurse being gone out of the room, he told me that he wanted to make some arrangements for his wife, in case anything should happen to himself.

“Not that I anticipate a fatal termination,” he hastily added; “but it is as well to be prepared for any event. I have no right to expect that Isabel will regret me; I have not given her much cause. But it is of no use to speak of that now.”

He paused and groaned deeply: his wound caused him extreme suffering, and his mind was half astray; his working lips, contracted brow, and ashen cheek attested that he had a coward fear of death.

His was not a brave nature. I could not but pity him as the great beads of perspiration oozed on his forehead, and his fierce eyes were darkened with burning tears.

It was not without a great effort that he could proceed with what he wished to say.

“If ever I rise from this bed, it will be as a ruined man,” he gasped at length. “Kirklands I could not sell, or it would have gone long since: all the saleable timber was cut down last year. The house is falling into ruin for want of repairs. There will be that and Isabel’s settlement: nothing else except her jewels. I am glad I did not get them from her. Since the boy died, I have been quite reckless. I don’t know that I can do anything better than die—nothing less than a miracle could help me to retrieve that desperate throw: it was of no use taking half measures. Oh, that cursed woman!”

He began to speak in an excited way, while his face flushed, and his eyes burnt with fever.

Alarmed for the consequence, I attempted to leave him, but he arrested me with a feeble motion of his hand.

“Promise me not to leave Isabel,” he said with difficulty. “In a few hours my fate will be decided one way or other. Let nobody in to see

me: I should like to have poor Isabel about me though. She has the softest step and gentlest touch of any woman I know: she nursed me through a fever that I had soon after we were married. But I cannot bear tears and reproaches: my only chance is perfect quiet."

The pain of his wound extorted another groan from his labouring chest; for a second or two he lay silent, and then bade me call in the nurse. As I went out, I faced my sister, standing pale but quite collected and self-possessed before the door.

"You need tell me nothing, Kathie: I have heard all, and am going in there to my husband," she said, quietly.

"Yes, Isabel; he has asked for you."

A sort of sudden light came over her countenance, but faded almost ere it was seen; accompanied by the nurse, she accordingly entered Reginald's room.

It was a tedious cure, and for weeks a very doubtful one. Isabel's tenderness and devotion were beautiful to witness; and I think they

touched her husband's hard heart to the core. Her face lost its wan hopelessness, and a sort of chastened joy looked forth from her eyes: it seemed that she had triumphed over his evil nature by her faithfulness. He was ready and eager to acknowledge it himself; and I felt half ashamed of the doubts that lessened to my mind his sick repentance. Would it stand?

It was the end of September before he was fit to be removed, and then we travelled by slow journeys to London. Here we left him, on the plea of urgent business to transact, and Isabel and I travelled down to Kirklands alone. This urgent business we were both fully aware was play.

XLVIII.

The house at Kirklands had been suffered to fall into partial ruin. Like many fine residences of its period, it was built round a hollow square. The front apartments nearest the sea, had been

unroofed by a violent storm in the life-time of its last possessor, and had never been restored. The windows and great entrance were built up, and within the empty walls grew thick alder-bushes, nettles, and thorns, amongst the masses of fallen rubbish which had never been cleared away.

The few apartments that were habitable put me in mind of the haunted houses in the story-books that I had read when a child: they had all an inland aspect; and mine, which was lighted by three long deeply sunken windows, was called "Lady Anne's Room." It looked upon the garden—an oblong square, enclosed by a low wall, with a terrace at one side. It had a very neglected appearance: the lawn—long unmown—was covered with coarse grass and reeds, and in the midst was a sun-dial half grown over with ivy. Only a few of the commonest and hardiest plants bloomed in the formal beds that skirted the pathways; but the whole garden front of the house was tapestried with inwoven masses of ivy, rose, jasmine, and other creepers. In some instances they had been suffered to encroach

entirely over the windows, darkening the rooms within completely. At the further end of this waste was a planting of sweet willow, and a gate leading into an orchard, where were giant fruit-trees and gnarled trunks, coeval with the house itself. The grounds sloped down to the backs of the houses which bordered the near side of the harbour, and on the further side rose lofty cliffs. From our windows we could see a grey line of wolds, and gleams of a river which entered the sea just below the precipitous rocks on which Kirklands stood.

From the terrace we looked over the Abbey meadows, where stood the ruins of a monastery: far beneath spread the ocean, dotted with boats and sails in fair weather, covered with foam and fragments of wreck when foul winds blew.

The ascent to the house by the carriage-road was dangerously steep, and the entrance through the open gateway into a turfed court unpromising. There was a stagnant fish-pond, with broken fountain and stone steps, an unfathomable well, and some immense pear-trees which, for genera-

tions, had produced no crop but leaves; and the whole shut in by high walls.

Kirklands Church and grave-yard were close by, upon the same east cliff; there was a scent and a presence as of death about the place. Strange that fortune should have carried us up to that old ghost-house, and cut us off from the world as effectually as if she had left us in a prison.

The prospect within was not a whit less dreary than that without. Our sitting-room was long and lofty, wainscotted in panel, and painted of a pale green, with tarnished gilt mouldings; the hangings were of purple silk, dropping to tatters with age; and the furniture, all of antique and unwieldy form, was covered with threadbare velvet of the same hue. Of all in that desolate chamber we two women only seemed less than a century old. It had a circular portrait of a Sir Hugh (there always is some such portrait in old houses of note)—a false-eyed, beautiful youth in the dress of a cavalier, who, I thought at first, looked gay and *debonnaire*; but the housekeeper

told us that there was a legend concerning him which charged him with having slain his brother in a fit of jealous rage, and then thrown himself from the cliff into the sea, where he was drowned. This room opened into a corridor, lighted at both ends by a tall, narrow lancet—lighted, if anything could be light in that ghastly place. It seems to me now, when I look back, that it was always twilight there, or storm, or utter darkness. A Rembrandt picture touched with electric fire.

XLIX.

Isabel could not settle, neither could I. We were ever in a state of expectancy: such a thing as sitting down to sew or read, or gathering about us home-like employments, was impossible: we were like travellers halting for an anxious rest before embarking on a dangerous voyage.

Beyond the frowsy garden, the court-yard, and the Abbey meadows, we never went, except to the church just outside the gateway, almost on

the edge of the cliff, whose gleaming white grave-stones might be seen by the mariners far out at sea.

Our daily excitement was watching for the post. I have known us both sit waiting for an hour beyond the time, buoyed up with the hope that there might have been some accidental delay. We spoke very little together then: the days were gone when there was comfort in many words, and even complaint had a hope behind it.

At last there came a letter from Reginald for Isabel. I can see her yet! the tremulous eagerness with which she seized it, the tearful joy with which she cried, "He is coming! He will be here to-morrow at noon! to-morrow at noon!"

Her eyes kindled, her brow lightened, and she looked happy again once more.

We had waited for that letter long: all through the wild autumn weather, and now it was Christmas Eve. We listened that night to the clanging old church bells; and talked about

Eversley, and home, and our mother. Isabel had bright thoughts, but mine were all sad:—it was the time, and what the time recalled.

Up to the house on the cliff had come from week to week, during the past autumn, whispers of that pestilence which had ravaged England when Felix Mayne lived at Kingston. We heard of sudden deaths—of thousands stricken in one day; but now the grave was sated, and its grey minister gleaned only here and there one. I could not shake myself free of dismal memories, though we had lived remote from the destroyer's battle-ground, as if in another land.

“To-morrow at noon” came, but with it came not Reginald. Preparations had been made. Isabel had dressed herself in her prettiest suit: she was never a moment still as the time approached; and her glad excitement broke from her lips in short snatches of song. From the window of my room we could see the road that wound up the hill; and after the hour fixed was past, there she stationed herself to watch.

The night fell—the long dark Christmas night—but he never came: we knew then that he would never come again! No more pardon, love, hope, or peace; no more looking forward to re-union!

He had been taken ill on the road, and had died: one of the last victims to the pestilence.

L.

It is too painful to dwell on the months that followed this event. My sister had a long and severe illness from which she recovered partially, but she was no more herself. She was quiet and patient, with no recollection of the past, and one fixed idea—waiting for her husband. She was sure that yet he would return, and they should be happy.

During the succeeding summer her health again declined: her frame was worn almost to a shadow; but her hope lost none of its tenacity, or her patient love of its strength.

One night in September I came in from the garden, after vainly attempting to walk myself warm. The keen sea-wind, from which there was no shelter in the low stone walls or the stunted shrubs that skirted the pathways, had pierced to the marrow of my bones. I was chilled and depressed with a black shadow looming heavy and close.

“Some new sorrow is coming,” I said to myself, as I crept along the dusky corridor to my room. All my life through have I been subject to these presentiments of approaching evil. A warning shadow, forecast on my path by advancing fate, has ever crept to my feet and bid me pause, abide still, and watch. I almost feared to see some spectral form gliding in my steps and peering over my shoulder as I traversed the echoing passages, and twice or thrice looked back in trembling expectancy.

This old house of Kirklands in its ruinous desolation, and what had happened since we had come there, had not been without effect on my nerves. I began to shudder at the rustling

amongst the dead leaves that cumbered the garden walks: the swaying and creaking of the great fruit-trees in the orchard made my heart stand still an instant, and then throb tumultuously, agonizingly. Many a time in those long autumnal nights did I lie trembling in my bed as the shrill-toned blast came whistling down the chimney, rattling at the windows and ill-closed doors.

Sir Hugh seemed to take a life-like glimmer into his eyes, and I fancied his right hand stained red with his brother's blood; his cheek paled and grew hollow, and his broad brow swart and lowering.

It was dreary, too, listening to the dash of the waves at the base of the cliff whereon Kirklands stood; most dreary when the north-east wind was whistling through the abbey cloisters, and shrieking triumphant over the grey expanse of autumn wold.

And to see poor Isabel! half mistress, half prisoner, trailing about the corridors, always in gala-dress to do Reginald honour; going from room

to room, from window to window, watching, waiting, and hoping; standing with head bent to listen, and hand raised to command silence; patient, unresting, with a senseless expectancy of what could never be. Her haggard, youthful face, dressed round with fluttering loose ringlets; her lips curved and iced into a perpetual, meaningless smile; her voice in its chanting tone, that it wrung my heart to hear, saying in the morning, "He will be here to-day;" and every night, with no whit of its hope abated, "He will come to-morrow."

As I entered my chamber on this evening, I found her peering out at the open window at an angle of the road, visible beyond the orchard wall. She was singing, in a plaintive half-tone, a song that I had not heard before, but always in the same dull, unconscious way:—

" The night is dreary,
The wind is eerie,
And I am all alone :
My heart is weary
And very weary,
For my love, my love is gone !

“ The white stars shimmer,
With fading glimmer,
Upon the frozen lake :
My eyes grow dimmer
And ever dimmer,
Weeping for his sweet sake.

“ The night is dreary,
The wind is eerie,
And I am all alone :
My heart is weary
And very weary,
For my love, my love is gone !”

She reiterated this mournful ditty until no eye but her own could trace the road ; then she shut down the window, and turned round.

“ It is too late now, Kathie : he will not come to-night,” she said tranquilly, but with a very sad intonation.

“ Yes, it is too late now, Isabel dear. Shall we go to the drawing-room ? There is a fire, and it is warm there.”

I attempted to lead her away, but she gently resisted.

“ I do not care for the cold. We can listen better here : let us stay a little longer,” she

pleaded. " I will lie down on your bed, for I am weary, weary. It has been a long watch, but *surely* he will come to-morrow."

So she lay down, and I paced the room wrapped in my shawl.

It was changing to a wild and tempestuous night. Through the uncurtained windows I could see the moon riding swiftly amidst rifted clouds, and the black sea-swell rolling up loud and angry against the rocks. I stood to look out. Darkness had closed in quickly; but a pale greenish lustre showed over the sea, and a distant mutter spoke of angry winds coming up that way. Often in these still and lonely nights did I turn back page after page of my past life, and give myself to their perusal; but on this occasion an unseen power snatched me from by-gone things, and sternly riveted my thoughts upon the dreary present.

Isabel suddenly raised herself up. " Listen, Kathie! What is that sound?" she exclaimed. " It is the tramp of a horse on the road! Look out! Listen!"

She bent her ear to the window, and I did the

same, humouring her fancy, and both holding our breath.

“It is nothing!” she murmured at length, and lay down again.

It was quite dark in the room; I could not see her face; but in these imaginations of hers there was nothing strange to me. I continued my march.

By and by she rose again.

“Go up to the tower, sister Kathie, and see if he is coming!” she said, laughing that insane laugh which is more torturing than tears. “I hear a horse galloping hard on the road! Who can it be but Reginald? Go up to the tower and listen, and look out.”

I went out into the corridor, and up to its furthest window, where a gleam of moonshine broke the darkness. The long sough of the night wind over the sea, and the beating of the waves against the rocks, were the only sounds. After a few minutes I went back.

“There is no one in sight, Isabel, darling,” I said. “Let us go down to the fire: it is so cold and desolate here.”

“Where is it not cold and desolate?” she said, sobbing. “It is cold and desolate at my heart always! Oh, if he does not come soon I shall die, and never, never, never, see him again!”

She suffered me to guide her to the old parlour where the candles were lighted, and a bright fire burnt upon the hearth. The woman who waited upon us was closing the shutters. Isabel bade her leave them open.

The servant remonstrated.

“The wind is enough to drive the sashes in, Miss Brande,” she said, appealing to me. “I have not heard such a storm blow since the front roof fell in. They had best be fastened.”

“He is out in it all, poor Reginald!” replied Isabel piteously. “Leave them a little longer open. It will cheer him to see the windows’ light, and to know that we are thinking of him and expecting him.”

If that lost spirit could indeed have peered in from the murky night at his once passionately loved wife, he could not in his remorseful anguish have uttered a more fearful wail than moaned by

on the blast, as Isabel spoke. She shuddered; we all shuddered: it thrilled so like a cry of mortal strife and pain on everyone.

“How cold it is! how bitter cold!” gasped my sister, faintly; “and dark too: don’t shut out the sky; I like to watch the clouds, Kathie. What is this little child at my knee?”

“There is no child here, Isabel: there is nobody but Jane and me.”

She looked wistfully in my face, and presently lay down on the couch by the hearth, when she began to talk softly to herself; she was at our child’s prayers again. She went through them twice, and as she finished the hymn, she turned her face to me. I had not seen it so bright or clear since last Christmas Eve.

“What music is that? Oh, Kathie, how strange and sweet it sounds!” she cried; then the light faded out of her eyes, and she felt about for my hand, and clasped it fast. “Kiss me, Kathie!”

I saw what was coming. Oh, God! how well I had learned to interpret this blind gazing at the

world that is fading away. Oh, Isabel, my beautiful sister! was it come to this?

“There is that little child again—my baby! Oh, Reginald, why are you not with us? Come, come.”

They were the last words she ever spoke.

LI.

Isabel lies buried in that ancient sea-side church upon the cliff. Kirklands is a bone of contention among many claimants; it is in Chancery: but even that cannot give it a wilder or more desolate aspect than it had when I knew it. I came away two days after my sister's burial, and I have never seen it since.

This is the gloomiest of all my experiences of life: it never brightens in my memory; it is all thick, impenetrable shadow. It was a haunting sorrow to me for years: I continued to hear the wail on the blast, and the murmured child's prayers, amidst the bustle and business of strange

scenes; and alone at night the swelling and rushing sounds of the sea, though it were a hundred miles away, would fill my dreams.

Those days of mourning are over. When I remember Isabel now, it is as one safe and at rest—better in God's merciful keeping than if she had awakened again to the pain of her desolated life. Let me close this chapter of my history, to revert to it no more.

LII.

When through all a lifetime one daily necessity—the necessity to work—has been present with us, its sudden withdrawal leaves a blank—a very fatiguing and oppressive blank. In this position I now found myself.

While at Kirklands, my old friend Mr. Longstaff died and left me a bequest of five thousand pounds—a fortune which lifted me above the need of labouring for my bread for the rest of my life. I felt lost: circumstances had hitherto guided me

effectually ; the day's wants and the day's work had hedged me in. I was much like a traveller in a strange country, who sees no guide-posts to direct him, and stands mooning about until some one comes to show the way. Thus far the torrent of existence had swept me to and fro on its surface with as little power of resistance as a straw has against a full, swift stream ; now a calm had fallen, and I must steer my course for myself.

Stephen's wife would have had me return to them, but I preferred independence and quiet to what had been my previous experience there. Jean, who had now two children, wrote and offered me a home with her ; or, if I liked it better, there was a pretty cottage near the Vicarage which I could tenant, and thus have a fireside of my own. This latter plan approved itself to my judgment, but first I determined to go back to Eversley. I had an invincible hankering after the old place : something almost as strong as fate seemed impelling me towards it.

It was not so very long since I had left it, but still there were great changes. The days of

coach travelling were over, and the first thing I saw in approaching the city was the Minster rising up in hoary majesty against the pale blue of the January sky. It seemed but as yesterday since I had looked at it through blinding tears when I turned my back on the old house where I was born.

Having deposited my luggage at the inn where I intended staying, I went out to see my ancient haunts. How quiet, old-fashioned, and familiar looked the streets, and yet what strange faces there were grouped about well-known door-ways; fine plate-glass fronts replaced many of the old bow-windowed shops; the Minster tower had been built up again, and was growing grey; and the West Bar had been restored.

It was nearly the hour for afternoon-service, and the bell was going; on the steps loitered the chorister boys, and a few individuals were walking leisurely towards the great south entrance. Mr. Withers—a trifle more bent than formerly—went in, batting meditatively with his umbrella. I entered the choir, and sat down on one of the

benches near the altar. Presently it grew dark almost, and when the glorious organ pealed forth, I seemed borne back on the waves of sound to that lost time of my youth when I dreamed strange wild dreams of the Minster in ages past. All the interval was forgotten: my slow pulses quickened, thoughts fantastic streamed through my brain; but when the suggestive music ceased I was my solitary self again, with no possession in Eversley but two graves.

In going out of the choir, when the congregation dispersed, a gentleman passed me by rather quickly, leading a little boy dressed in mourning by the hand. I recognised Felix Mayne by his straight port and regular step; but I did not see his face, nor he mine. Who could have prophesied, a few years ago, that we two should ever meet there as strangers?

As I left the Minster all the bells rang out a merry peal, for it was some fête-day in Eversley. I stopped on the steps to listen awhile, thinking that they were not so sweet as those that used to ring the Old Years out and the New Years in

when I was a child at home; and though I have been since assured that they are much finer, I cling still to my own opinion. In the cold January twilight I next walked on to Percie Court. The threatened demolition had not taken place: the house and gateway were there, gloomy and quiet as ever. The door was open, and a woman who descended the staircase as I stood looking about informed me, in answer to my inquiries, that four families now tenanted the house—would I go in and see it? There was a coloured window on the stairs which people thought very fine, and which was going to be removed to a church that was being restored in the Barbican. No; home-illusions must not be dispelled: so declining the invitation, I turned into Westgate, determined to close that day's wandering by a visit to Miss Bootle, in the Old Maids' Hospital.

The prim portress who admitted me—herself one of the sisterhood—was very critical over getting my name right for announcement; but at last she led me up to No. 7—the apartment

occupied by my ancient friend. The sudden change from external darkness to the bright, well-lighted little room, dazzled my eyes so much for a moment that I saw nothing clearly except a white cat, sitting sedately in the centre of the hearthrug; then immediately I was clasped in the fluttering embrace of Miss Bootle, whilst she cried, "Oh, Kathie, Kathie! who could have thought it? Well, I am glad! I am glad!"

Then she inducted me into the chair from which she had risen, and stood looking at me, and reiterating her expressions of satisfaction. All the time I had a consciousness of somebody else being present, but I did not dare at once to ascertain the truth of the warning I felt by glancing at the figure beyond hers, sitting by the hearth. It was not a minute before we rose simultaneously, as if moved by one impulse, and Kathie's hand again quivered in that of Felix Mayne. He was quite self-possessed and calm, but I was thrilling with alternate chill and fever; I was like a log—so stupid and confused in his presence. His son was standing beside him—a bluff, curly-headed

little fellow with a great look of his father about his eyes: he offered me a tiny, fat hand at Miss Bootle's bidding, and then retreated to Felix's side. The old lady drew in another chair and sat down, and her cat immediately availed himself of the opportunity to jump into her lap.

"Charlie, behave yourself: don't you see that I have company?" said she, giving him an admonitory tap on the nose. "Now, will you two stay and have tea with me? If you will, I shall be delighted."

Mr. Mayne could not—he was to dine with Mr. Withers, he said; but he remained a quarter of an hour longer, and spoke to me kindly about my recent loss in my sister's death.

He was not much changed, except that the thick clustered locks about his temples were iron grey, and his figure was rather heavier than formerly. His way of speaking too was slower, and I might have fancied that beneath his grave bearing lurked some sting of disappointment, some unsatisfied craving, had I not known how fair and honourable a career he was running before

all men. But he was ambitious; and as it is the nature of ambition to delude its votaries, he might, in the midst of his other successes, have missed the one thing that would have given zest to all besides.

“Where are you staying in Eversley?” he asked as he was going away; and I told him the name of the Inn. “Harry will come to visit you—shake hands with this lady, Harry, and kiss her.” The little fellow did so readily, looking very hard at me all the time. “Hannah is with us—as fresh as ever; you will scarcely see her changed.” And after a few more indifferent observations he and the child went away together.

“Poor Mr. Mayne! I am so sorry for him!” said Miss Bootle immediately we were alone; “to lose his beautiful young wife so soon!”

Then that fair creature was dead!

“It is not more than two months since: he feels it extremely, and it has quite changed him. I thought him dull to day—did not you, Kathie?” she added.

Yes: I had found him different; but now his depression was explained. I felt very sorry for him and the child.

“There is a baby; he had it christened Emmeline Katherine, but they call it always Kathie, like you. I wonder at that, now the mother is gone, but perhaps it hurts him to hear her name; she was a lovely creature, so gentle and graceful, and proud of her husband!”

I cannot tell why, but it pleased me to think that Felix should have borne me so long in remembrance, and kept my name, as it were, in the light of his hearth by giving it to one of his children.

Miss Bootle kept me all the evening, making me listen to the interesting feats recently performed by the venerable Charlie, and to the gossip of the spinster community. How Miss Linnet was become blind and deaf; how Miss Fernley had got a new dog, a terrier, which daily tried to provoke Charlie to single combat, and was chastised for his belligerent disposition whenever he could be caught; how Miss Parke, the

last admitted of the spinsterhood, a lady of penurious habits, would not employ the portress, but acted as her own housemaid: how she had polished her fire-grate with blacking, and her boots with blacklead, and made a loaf of bread so hard that it might have been thrown over the Minster without danger of being broken; how Miss Parley, the busybody of the community, had said that Miss Crosby had said that she had been informed, on the best authority, that there was one lady in the Home who had something more than a ladylike taste for strong waters; how there had been a meeting on the stairs in consequence, with a general investigation of cupboards—all except Miss Parley's, who treated every imputation with contempt, and was therefore, I might be assured, the guilty party: this with much more information of the same quality, which formed the staple conversation of the Old Maids. But there was a great spirit of kindness amongst them too: they were not the selfish, censorious, mischief-making tribe that some people like to assert. In sickness

they were attentive and watchful for each other; and the night I was there I saw Miss Bootle don a flannel gown and mob cap, because it was her turn to sit up with Miss Grant, who was ill. I like Old Maids.

LIII.

The next morning, while I was dressing to go out for a ramble round the walls, came Harry, with Hannah and the little baby. The boy had brought his whole establishment of Noah's Ark to exhibit, and demanded with importunity that I should help him to set it out, which I did.

"Who are you? What am I to call you? Papa called you Kathie, like baby," he lisped, looking at me very steadfastly.

Hannah bade him hush, and then began to tell me that he was awful to deal with: worse than his father had been, and *wicker* if possible. He did recall to me the "troublesome tyke"

that his father had been called by Hannah, for he was up and down, and on every chair in the room, in five minutes; he wanted to touch and ask questions about everything, and to exercise mastership over everybody. He had a fine countenance, frank and intelligent; his brow was broad, his cheeks rosy, and his lips sweetly curved; and though his temper was hasty it was generous, and he had an affectionate heart. The baby was a fair blue-eyed little thing, that looked profoundly wise and happy, and very fat; it took after its mother more than Felix.

Harry and I were presently the best friends in the world: we had a walk together, in the course of which he informed me that they were going home to Wortlebank soon, and he should be glad, for he wanted to see his pet rabbits, and Carlo, and Ponto, and his pony; and had I been at Wortlebank and should I like to go? The house was on a hill, and there were flowers, and trees, and a pond: he had tumbled into the pond, and Hannah pulled him out; he did not

care about it: he should learn to swim some day. Papa could swim; could I? Hannah could not, and cook could not, but Ponto and Carlo could; they liked it. And so on; his little tongue never stopping until I knew all about Wortlebank, and the live-stock there maintained, and was in the confidence of the rabbits as to what they liked best to eat, and how many apartments their hutch contained, and how many they were in family, with other particulars of vast interest to Harry.

Then he wanted to know if I had any pets where I lived; and it being explained to him that I had no home, he eyed me with profound commiseration and wonder, and offered to give me a rabbit to begin my establishment with. Dear little heart! The same day Felix Mayne called upon me to say good-bye. He left Eversley with his children on the morrow. And having seen my father's and mother's graves, and my old servant Ann, now the possessor of a stout boy, I set my face steadily towards the place that I proposed henceforward to make my home.

I saw now what it was that had drawn me so resistlessly towards Eversley. It was that Felix Mayne and I might meet.

LIV.

So I travelled up into Berriedale, where lived my sister Jean, and having taken possession of "The Nook," sat down to keep house for myself—a free, independent woman, without a tie, a care, or a need in the world. You will naturally imagine that I should be happy and contented, now that my time was come to luxuriate in the quiet of repose: to do what I liked, go where I liked, and be as idle as I pleased. Well, you shall judge.

"The Nook" was five minutes' walk from the Parsonage House, where I could see Jean, her husband, and her baby-girl daily, if such were my pleasure. It was nested in a green hollow, circled with trees on the east and north, and having an unintercepted view of Berriedale south and west;

there were mossy slopes down to the sweet lakelet near, and blue hills in the remote distance. Its garden was terraced on the descent of the south side of the hollow, and showed to the windows a rich covering of flowers ; and the tiny rooms were filled with the prettiest cottage furniture that could be had at Carlisle. I caused book-shelves to be constructed in every recess, and filled them with good new works. Jean said "The Nook" was a little paradise.

All the alterations and arrangements being made, there was nothing more to do but to live and improve my mind.

I regulated my days strictly : so many hours for study, so many for exercise, so many for helping my sister in the school and amongst the poor. This would have made some women happy, but it did not satisfy me. I tried to read wise, solid books, and found no interest therein. Next I would put myself through a course of French, Italian, and German—useless. I had never known more than the elements, and had nothing to work from : my brain was not active enough to plod

through rules and exercises; my talent for languages was infinitesimal. Miss Palmer used to say so: repeated present failures proved her right.

I fell back insensibly into my old trick of day-dreaming: roaming about the silent summer hills, and along the shores of the clear lake, with no other company than my idle thoughts. There had been times when I coveted such an existence as a respite from work and care; but now, being put into possession thereof, I found it stagnant, lifeless, selfish, wearisome. Jean marvelled, and asked what I would have; then, in her gentle, orderly way, counselled me to be active, and in furtherance of this beneficial state, offered me plain sewing to do for the poor old women of the parish. I accepted it; and when the long evenings returned to keep me in-doors, did a considerable amount of useful needlework. For company there was the tinkling of the fire in the grate, the wavering of my own shadow on the wall, and the spirit of some living genius evoked from the vital page to talk awhile with mine.

What could a reasonable woman crave beside?

Unfortunately, I never was a reasonable woman. A restless spirit always possessed me whenever and wherever fate chained me down: there was a burden of wasting energy clogging my being; what I did neither filled my mind nor my time, nor did it satisfy my conscience. I seemed to be of no more use in the world than the snail in its shell. In course of my early laborious years I had often made it a matter of reflection how ladies, without recognised vocations, filled up the hours of their day. Did they do worsted roses, or bore holes in muslin for their chief work; or write letters, or practise the piano, or gossip and spoil sheets of cardboard; or did they do each and all alternately, the year in and the year out, until they were exalted to the head of an establishment, or gently declined into spinsterdom? Not that I despised or condemned these innocent and useful occupations; but if they were, or are, the staple of some women's lives, lucky are those whom fortune has constrained to earn the bread they eat.

LV.

For nearly sixteen months I lived on at "The Nook" in this state of rebellious indolence. I endeavoured to make my pen, long laid aside, companionable again; but imagination now went clad in sober weeds, and the inspiration of my thoughts was no more hope but only memory. The rhymes and stories that I spun in my enforced leisure found their readers at the rectory—I believe my sister Jean still keeps them—but they travelled no further abroad; their end was accomplished when they had filled my vacancy. The common-place-book that I kept, too, during these days, far out-rivalled in bulk that old one to which reference has twice been made in these pages—and that, the cream of many an hour's pleasant reading, some one else treasures as a memento of that time. I like to look at it occasionally myself, that I may compare old

impressions with new, and note what struck me as true, forcible, and actual then.

My circumstances guided my taste assuredly : backward glances at youthful days, dreary reflections on the vanity of human hopes, are thick set upon the pages, but of lightsome fancy there is very, very little. My life then was a weariness, a craving for something it had not, and never hoped to have again.

How would my heart have echoed this exquisite thought of one whom I have been told lies in her grave now, though when I was wearing through my troubles she had not written it, conceived it—was, indeed, in the blossom of her youth.

“ However old, plain, desolate, afflicted we may be, so long as our hearts preserve the feeblest spark of life, they preserve also, shivering near that pale ember, a starved, ghostly longing for appreciation and affection.”

Yes—“ a starved, ghostly longing for appreciation and affection ”—that was what gnawed at my heart perpetually ; there had never been but one who appreciated me, never but one who loved me

as I would be loved. And where was he? Busy in the world; full of care, of business, of pleasure perhaps.

For sixteen months, as I said before, did I linger on at "The Nook;" but in the second spring the restless fit seized me again, and I was seriously meditating a flight when there came for me once more a day of real sunshine. Jean, meeting me that morning in the Parsonage Lane cried out, "Kathie, one would say that you bloom late! You have quite a colour in your face: our Berriedale breezes have turned you young again!"

I said, "Have they, Jeanie? I am glad of that. I felt an hour ago as if I were floating backward a year or two. So I don't look *quite* ancient?"

"No, not at all! What has happened? Tell me—tell me quick!"

This was what had happened. That morning, while gathering a few early blowing violets in the garden, the Berriedale postman handed me a letter over the hedge: one of those dear, Thursday letters that used to come to Percie Court so many

years ago. It was like them in tone and spirit; and, as then, it filled me with a quiet gladness. Felix wrote that he was going to travel into the north, "and whether I come to Berriedale or not must depend on you, Kathie," he added.

And I had written "Come."

LVI.

One morning, then, when "The Nook" was looking its brightest under a spring sunshine, he came, and I met him alone at the gate. There was no need of lengthy explanation: we were together, and we were happy. Our fate was given to us, and we were content.

"You wear my ring still, Kathie, I see," Felix said.

"Yes; it has never been absent from my finger a single day since you put it on eleven years ago."

"Faithful Kathie!"

"And are you happy, Felix?"

“Yes; I have got my desire now. I have had my fill of other people’s praise, and only care to hear Kathie tell me that I have done well.”

“Felix, it has been the greatest pride of my life to remember that you loved me.”

“As it shall be my life’s pleasure to love thee always, my darling Kathie!”

When Francis Maynard and Jean arrived an hour after, all the sorrowful past had been briefly conned and put away from us, and we were busy with our future: as happy and scarcely less hopeful than on the first day of our acknowledged love.

A month later I went to Wortlebank with Felix—his wife. His children—*my* children now—were there to welcome us; and that was the happiest coming home I ever had, or am ever likely to have in this world.

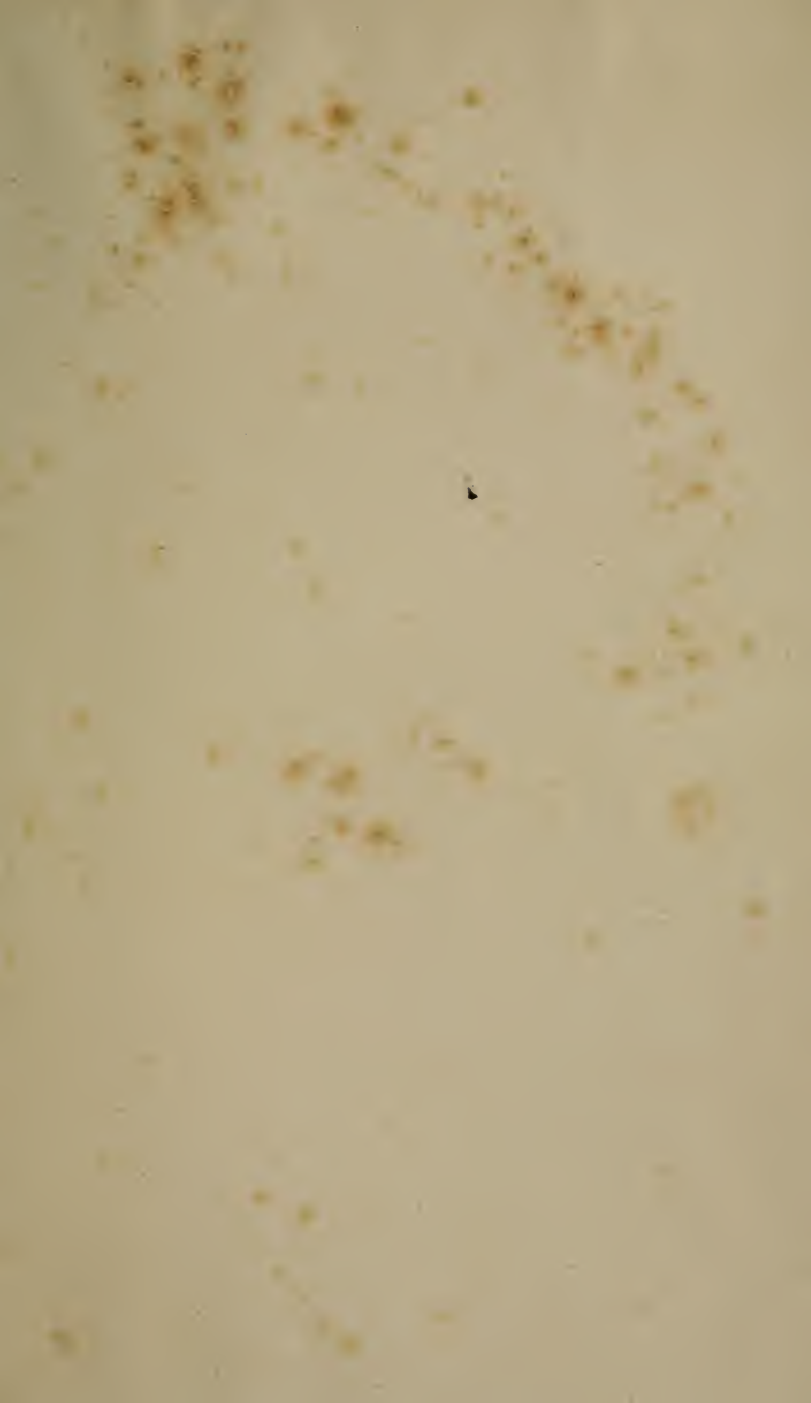
And now, my fate being rounded to the full accomplishment of all my dearest hopes, what does there remain to chronicle besides? Fireside happiness—calm, pure, equable—cannot be much dilated on. Our united lives have flowed

smoothly and pleasantly, and I think not that our long separation has been without its good for both. It is half a dream to look back upon now, and the shadows that haunt it wear the guise of Faith and Patience and Love, and have no frown of reproach to darken the time present. Our hearth is joyous with young faces—"troublesome tykes!" says Hannah; but "there's many a care comes saddled with a blessing," say I, quoting my old servant, Ann—a homely truth which every mother's heart must echo

Farewell.

THE END.

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